

The World's Fair Favorite Among Desert Desperadoes!

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BUFFALO BILL'S SWEEPSTAKE.

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

AUTHOR OF THE "BUFFALO BILL" NOVELS, "MERLE, THE MUTINEER," "MONTEZUMA, THE MERCILESS" ETC., ETC.



AS BUFFALO BILL APPROACHED THE STOCKADE CHEERS UPON CHEERS WELCOMED HIM.

Buffalo Bill's Sweepstake;

OR,

The Wipe-out at Last Chance.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "BUFFALO BILL" SERIES, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE LOST MINER.

*"Lost in the desert!"**"Starving, burning up with thirst, suffering the torments of the accursed—ay, dying."**"Not a soul near to help me, not a blade of grass, or drop of water to cheer, to sustain me, not even a coyote in sight— Ha! but a bird of prey watching and waiting for me to sink down and die, that he may drive his cruel beak into my vitals."**The speaker was on foot, but his horse, with head hanging down and gaunt flanks, was following his rider across the burning sands of an Arizona desert.**The man tottered in his walk, for he was weak from thirst and hunger, too weak to mount his horse, which, had he been able to do so, could have borne him no further.**He was dressed in buckskin leggins, top-boots and blue flannel hunting-shirt, and upon his head was a gray sombrero.**Upon his saddle-horn hung a rifle and his belt of revolvers, but they were useless there, for no game was near, no enemy would dare venture into that desert, and only a few vultures soaring in a cloudless, burning sky were visible in all the vast expanse of rolling sand-hills and volcanic mountains where no verdure could be found.**The face of the famished man was pinched and haggard, and the lips were drawn tight, revealing his white teeth, giving him a ghastly grin like a smile upon a skull.**His eyes burned brightly with the fever that was consuming him, and yet his face was livid at the thought of approaching death.**Well did he know that if help came not soon, if he did not find water and food, death would come to him before the setting of another sun.**Eagerly he watched the sun near the horizon, and he still staggered on, his faithful horse following in his tracks.**A huge boulder loomed up ahead, and unconsciously he directed his steps toward it.**Reaching the rock he halted, leant against it for a moment and then dropped down by it in the shade, shutting out the fierce glare of the sun.**The horse lowered his head until it too was in the shadow, and thus they were, man and beast, panting and suffering.**The hand of the man was raised and pressed upon the head of his faithful dumb friend, and as he caressed him he murmured:**"Well, old friend, we must die together, for I have not the strength to go further and you are little stronger than I."**"I will give you your freedom, for it would be a miracle if any one found us here, and so I will die alone, for untrammelled, with night coming on, your brute instinct, greater than that of the human being, may lead you to water and life."**"Come, old fellow, you must go!"**He rose with an effort, and took the saddle and bridle from the animal, and then struck him a light blow to send him away.**But, the faithful creature would not leave his master, until, with what strength he had, he took up stones and threw at him, calling out as well as his parched lips would allow:**"Go, sir, go! I must die alone, but you may find water and food."**"Go, I say, go!"**With a reproachful look at his master, as though wondering why he was treated thus, the animal started off in a slow walk, every now and then turning to look back toward the rock.**The sun at last neared the horizon, and the horse had disappeared from view, walking slowly and with an effort, splendid animal though he was when not worn down and suffering with thirst and hunger.**When the dark speck upon the horizon, that marked his horse, disappeared wholly from sight, the man uttered a cry of despair**and burying his face in his hands groaned in anguish of mind and body.**He could not weep, for the fountain of tears was dried up.**At last the moon peered up over the desert, and the eyes of the dying man were fixed upon it.**"Oh, how calm you look down upon my suffering!" he said aloud. "You gaze with the same serene face upon those I love, now so far away; you look down upon misery untold the world over; your golden face is watched by lovers and those who are happy, taking no count of the sorrows they do not feel—the misery of those they do not know."**"Here am I, with a treasure in my grasp, a fortune in a secret that I hold, one that would bring happiness to those I love, here upon this barren, desolate plain, with no human being within many, many miles of me—dying—dying; and with me must the secret die, while those dear to me must toil on in poverty and suffering."**"Oh, Heaven! must this be so? Is this the end of life, the end of all to me?"**"Those I would die for will never know, and maybe here no one will ever find my bleached bones nor discover the great secret that I know."**"After risking life in my search for gold, after enduring every hardship, facing every danger, I am to perish here in this pathless wilderness and all my struggles and sacrifices go for naught."**"Here in my grasp is the map of a find that is worth boundless riches for me and mine; and yet—Oh, pitiful misfortune, I must die, leaving the secret untold—Great God! death is upon me, now! Its icy touch is grasping my parched, burning throat—yes, all ends now—"**The man could not rise, his head drooped forward and he lay motionless upon the ground.*

CHAPTER II.

BUFFALO BILL APPEARS.

*A COLUMN of soldiers was filing slowly out of a stockade fort in Arizona, and the band was playing the Dead March.**To a casual observer it would have been thought a funeral; that the soldiers were marching to the grave with some dead comrade.**But no; there was no dead man being borne to the grave, but a live one.**A soldier rode upon a wagon, seated upon his coffin, for the corpse was yet to be made that was to be buried.**The man seated upon his coffin was of fine physique, dressed in uniform and had a face that was clean-shaven and so revealed every feature.**It was a strong face, though deathly pale now, a face that was fearless, passionate, determined in expression.**He looked neither to the right or the left as he was borne along, but kept his eyes fixed ahead upon a spot in the little valley, upon the bank of a pretty stream, where a group of men were standing, awaiting the coming cortege.**Where those men stood was seen fresh earth turned up, and an open grave.**Save the strains of the funeral march played by the band, no sound broke the stillness, and all faces look solemn and stern.**Down the hill wound the column, the infantry formed in three sides of a square, the open side toward the brook and the sun, now near its setting, and the execution squad marched to the grave and halted.**Just then a horseman came up at a gallop, on his way to the fort. He saw the scene on the banks of the stream, recognized there the commandant of the fort, and wheeling rode toward him.**The horse was a splendid one, the rider a magnificent specimen of manhood, tall, of fine build, upright in bearing and with a face which once seen could not be readily forgotten.**His hair swung in many waves below his broad shoulders, a mustache shaded his stern, expressive mouth and, dressed in buckskin with a wide-brimmed sombrero and top-boots he was a most picturesque-looking personage.**He sat his steed like one reared in the**saddle, and about his waist was a belt of arms while a rifle hung at his saddle horn.**All eyes were upon him as he rode up, for all recognized the noted scout, Buffalo Bill, who had voluntarily gone on a long trail, through a dangerous Indian country, to the headquarters of the district commander to see if a reprieve would be given the condemned man.**The condemned soldier who now stood at the head of his open grave, his coffin at his feet, had flushed at sight of the horseman, and then once more turned deadly pale, though otherwise he showed no fear and was perfectly calm.**The scout threw himself from his horse, when ten feet away from the commanding officer, who was near the prisoner, and saluting, handed to him a paper.**Not a word was uttered and a deathlike silence was upon all.**The eyes of each man moved in their sockets, turning from the prisoner to the commandant, as he read the official paper handed to him by Buffalo Bill.**The prisoner's face did not change; not a muscle quivered; only his breast rose and fell more rapidly.**Turning to the prisoner, when he had read the document, Major Randall said:**"Wallace Weston, Buffalo Bill risked his life to go to Fort Wingate and present a plea for a reprieve for you."**"For your sake I am sorry to say to you that the plea was in vain; for the colonel says that your offense, in taking the life of a brother soldier, was a most heinous one, and having been tried by court-martial and sentenced to death, he can do nothing—that you must die, and may Heaven have mercy upon your guilty soul."**The voice of Major Randall quivered as he spoke the words, but in firm tones the doomed man replied:**"I expected such a response; but am I to die bound like a wild beast?"**"No, free his arms and feet of the bonds upon them," ordered the major.**Two soldiers stepped forward and in a moment the man was free.**He turned and gazed about him an instant, his eyes suddenly falling upon the magnificent horse ridden to the spot by Buffalo Bill; then, with a mighty bound he had cleared the space between, had thrown himself into the saddle, and with a wild, defiant yell, was away.**"Shoot him down!" shouted Major Randall in tones of peremptory command.**But, vain the attempt!**Not a musket was loaded, and the execution squad had not yet charged their guns.**"You are a dead revolver-shot, Cody; bring him down, for he is yet within range," cried the officer.**The fugitive had dashed straight for the stream, and had forced the gallant horse to make the leap.**Down he had gone into ten feet of water, but rising quickly, was swimming for the other shore, and the stream was hardly fifty feet wide.**At the command Buffalo Bill drew his revolver, leveled it, and then said:**"Remember, Major Randall, that man once saved my life."**"Fire! I command you! Bring the horse down!" was the stern response, and Buffalo Bill leveled his revolver and pulled trigger.*

CHAPTER III.

THE ESCAPE.

*EVERY eye watched Buffalo Bill as he pulled trigger.**All knew that he was a dead shot—a man who never missed a foe or game he fired upon.**The hand was steady, the fugitive not yet a hundred feet away, and that same revolver had brought down, fired by that iron hand, aimed by that unerring eye, a deer at a hundred yards.**The sharp report came, the flash and the bullet sped on its way.**A murmur ran through the crowd of soldiers as they saw the bullet strike the water two feet to the right of the horse!**An impatient imprecation came from the*

major's lips, and Buffalo Bill fired again, just as the horse reached the other shore.

Again a murmur, for the bullet knocked up the earth to the left of the feet of the animal.

Once he had reached the land, with a yell of defiance the fugitive was away, glancing over his shoulder, while rapidly shot after shot rang out from the revolver.

But not a bullet touched horse or rider, or if it did, there was no evidence of its doing so.

Calmly the scout returned his revolver to his belt, and walked away, while Major Randall quickly ordered the cavalry, who were on foot to double-quick to the fort and pursue the fugitive.

Intense excitement for a few minutes followed, the daring escape of the condemned soldier, but military discipline promptly brought order out of chaos; the band began to play and the troops marched back to the fort.

As the head of the column reached the stockade gates, out of them rode a squad of cavalry headed by an officer, and they started off in hot pursuit of the fugitive from death at the hands of his comrades for a crime committed.

"And Buffalo Bill missed him, though he fired six shots," were the words going from lip to lip, and men shook their heads ominously, while now and then was one bold enough to say that:

"He did not aim to hit him—Buffalo Bill never misses his game, be it man or beast; he did not wish to kill him, or bring down his horse, and have him recaptured."

This was the opinion that rapidly gained ground, but whether true or not, Buffalo Bill had nothing to say. He quietly went to his quarters, making no remark at the loss of his horse, saddle, bridle and outfit, not to speak of his rifle which hung upon the horn of his saddle.

Fort Faraway was a very dangerous post, for it was in the midst of the Indian country, a military check upon the movements of the hostiles, and a barrier to keep them back from the settlements that were beginning to extend further and further out upon the Utah and Arizona frontier.

Several hundred soldiers were stationed there, consisting of a couple of sections of light artillery, two troops of cavalry, and three companies of infantry, with a score of scouts under Buffalo Bill, who was their chief, and in time of need further increased his command by some thirty cowboys who were stationed at the post guarding a herd of cattle that were kept there.

Half a troop of cavalry, under Lieutenant Tompkins, had started out after the fugitive soldier, now a deserter, as well as a man under death sentence, and yet the hope of catching him was very slight.

There was one chance, and that was, as he had gone toward the desert lands, they might be able to cut him off, drive him into them, and, without guide, food or water, rather than risk the tortures of starvation, he would yield himself a prisoner again, and submit to death by execution.

Away went the cavalry at a run, crossing the stream where the fugitive had, and pushing rapidly on toward a hill which they hoped to reach while there was yet light enough to obtain a view of a vast expanse beyond, when the soldier could be seen if within six or eight miles.

They pushed their horses hard and reached the hilltop just as the sun was touching the mountain horizon on the distant mountain range.

With his fieldglass to his eyes Lieutenant Tompkins swept the expanse before him and almost instantly called out:

"There he goes! He is heading directly along Death Trail and for the desert."

"We must deploy into a long line and thus pursue to the desert."

The order was given, the troopers deployed into a line a mile in length, and thus advanced at a gallop in chase.

A deep canyon split the plain on the right of the line, and a red cliff on the left, which no horseman could ascend, and then stretched away into the desert, so that the fugitive would be driven away from all hope of food, water and grass for his horse, and be forced to risk the deadly danger before him, or return and give himself up.

Lieutenant Tompkins was not a man to give up a chase until all hope of success failed, and though he had come without rations for his men, he pushed on at the risk of bringing suffering upon himself and his soldiers.

CHAPTER IV.

THE RETREAT.

WITH the moon, almost at its full, and the troopers scattered across the level plain of sand, from range to canyon, there was no chance of the fugitive slipping past them and going back into the mountain country, where game, grass and water were in abundance.

Out upon the desert they rode, guided by the light of the moon, and not until after midnight did Lieutenant Tompkins call a halt for rest, for then there was no grass for the horses, no water and the men must go supperless to their blankets.

The morning dawned to show that the fugitive, like themselves, had slept upon the desert.

He was visible a few miles away, just mounting the horse of Buffalo Bill, which had saved his life thus far, to continue his flight.

He saw the troopers as they did him, and started further into the desert at a canter.

"Come, men, Buffalo Bill had ridden a long way, so his horse must have been very tired, and must now be broken down."

"Our animals are fresh, and we can catch Weston by pushing him hard," called out Lieutenant Tompkins.*

He threw himself into his saddle as he spoke, and the men following his example, they were off at a swinging gallop.

Miles away was visible a clump of trees, and the guide told the lieutenant that there was a spring there, good grass and firewood in plenty, but beyond there was not another drop of water, blade of grass or tree for many, many long miles, the desert stretching away from that point into a woodless, treeless, waterless barren of sand.

That the horse ridden by the fugitive, splendid animal though he was, could not last much longer the officer and his men soon discovered, for their animals not being jaded, as was the scout's horse, by a four days' hard ride, were used up.

So they pushed on the more rapidly, convinced that in the oasis or motte, they would bring the prisoner to bay.

They drew rapidly nearer to the motte, in which they had seen the horseman disappear, and though the sun was blistering hot, the dust of fine sand torturing, and the heat causing their horses to pant like hounds, they did not draw rein until they dashed into the little bit of timber, men and animals glad to find water and shade at hand.

The gallant young lieutenant, convinced that the fugitive would stand at bay, preferring to die fighting rather than be shot down at execution, halted his men and rode on alone, determined to try parleying with Wallace Weston, before firing upon him.

As he came near the center of the timber he started, as a shout greeted him, and to his surprise saw the soldier mounted upon a fresh horse and flying away like the wind, while, standing near, with head hanging low, was the horse of Buffalo Bill stripped of his bridle, saddle, and outfit.

A loud call brought his men to the spot, and as they saw that the fugitive had a fresh mount, and a good one, the guide called out:

"He has picked up a stray horse that has wandered here, lieutenant, and that ends the chase."

"Can we not follow him, Casey?"

"No, sir, for you see our critters are dead beat, and his mount is as fresh as a bird; but he is going to certain death out yonder on that terrible desert."

"Will he not flank us and get back to the hills?"

"No, sir, for the canyons from there run in such a way that he can only come right back this way, or go straight on across the desert."

"Then he will do that."

"No, sir, for he'll never be able to strike

the other side, as he will be overcome with the heat, see *mirages*, and ride round and round in the desert until he dies, or his horse does, and that means that he will quickly follow."

"Well, we will halt here until to-morrow, for the horses will be all right, though we ourselves must starve it out."

"If he comes back it will be in that time, and if he does not, he will go to his death, as you say, for no man or beast can long survive out on that arid plain."

Making a show of still pursuing. Lieutenant Tompkins, the guard Casey, and a few of the troopers whose horses were in the best condition, kept up the chase, while the others were told to stake out their animals, and hunt about for some kind of game to stay their hunger.

After going half a dozen miles, however, Lieutenant Tompkins, in mercy to man and beast, gave the order to retreat, leaving the fugitive, whose horse was still fresh and far ahead, to continue his flight without further pursuit.

Returning to the motte the troopers found that their comrades had hunted in vain for any kind of game; but water was in plenty and that refreshed them, while their horses had good grass to feed on, which caused a sergeant to lament, and the others to acquiesce with him, hungry as all were, that they were not for the time being grass-eaters themselves.

That night they started upon their return to the fort, having done their best, but failed.

CHAPTER V.

NOT GIVEN UP.

WHEN the commandant of Fort Faraway found that the troopers under Lieutenant Tompkins did not return late at night, and knowing that they had gone off, in their hurried pursuit without rations, he ordered a force to be ready to go out the next morning and carry supplies to them.

He also sent for Buffalo Bill and when the chief of scouts appeared, said:

"Cody, there is no one who regards you more highly than I do, no one who would be further from doubting your loyalty, and yet I feel very sure that in this case you did not seek to bring down the horse upon which Sergeant Wallace Weston was making his escape."

"Major Randall, you may recall that I found Wallace Weston dying on the plains; that I took him to the nearest fort, and was the cause of his enlisting as a soldier when he recovered."

"He had been a soldier before, all knew, though he would have nothing to say of his past."

"I liked the man, and though stern, and holding apart from all, he was yet very popular and rose to a corporal's position, then to that of sergeant."

"That there was something between Sergeant Manton Mayhew and Weston, more than the quarrel that ended in the former's death, I am certain; but Weston would say nothing as to that, and accepted his condemnation in silence and without a murmur."

"You are aware, I believe, Major Randall, that Sergeant Weston, when we had the Indian battle in New Mexico, and in which my horse was killed, rode back alone, at the risk of his life, leading an animal for me to mount, and but for his aid then, I could never have escaped alive."

"It was for this that I rode to the general's quarters to try and get a delay in his execution, hoping that he might be able to bring some evidence that would change the sentence of death against him."

"I came just in time with the refusal of the general to interfere, and the man, a bold fellow as you know, leaped upon my tired horse and made his escape."

"You ordered me to fire, and I obeyed; but I was firing upon the horse that had been my comrade in many a danger, on many a long trail, and I was to bring down the man who had saved my life—the man I was instrumental in getting to enlist in the army."

Major Randall listened with deepest attention to the scout, and then said, while he was impressed with what he had heard.

* Lieutenant Tompkins, a gallant cavalry officer of the United States Army.—THE AUTHOR.

"I do not wonder, Cody, that you did not care to kill that man, and yet I know had you wished to have done so, you could have brought both horse and rider down, for you are too deadly a shot to have missed even with a revolver."

"You have lost your horse and outfit, and I can only report that firing upon the fugitive failed to bring him down."

"Thank you, sir."

"But I wish you to take the trail after him, run him to earth if possible, and if you capture him, as the day appointed for his execution has passed, I will take the responsibility of delaying further until a full report can be made to headquarters, and in that time, if Weston can be made to talk, to speak for himself, he may be able to clear away the evidence so as to get clemency shown him."

"I hope so, sir."

"Now, go with Lieutenant Peyton and twenty men, after that gallant young Tompkins, who will push on if he starves his men and kills his horses to capture Weston, whom, however, he has always liked."

"Lieutenant Peyton and his men can push on, while Lieutenant Tompkins returns to the fort, and you are to be the guide and scout, and I feel that you will do your duty."

"I will endeavor to do so, sir."

"You have other horses and outfits, I believe?"

"Yes, sir, and will be ready for the trail when you give the order to start, sir," and saluting, Buffalo Bill left the major's quarters.

Half an hour after Buffalo Bill, as scout, rode out in advance of the squad with supplies going to the relief of Lieutenant Tompkins.

The party pushed ahead at a brisk pace, carrying several pack-horses with them, and it was just daybreak, when passing over the ridge, for Buffalo Bill had followed the trail in the moonlight, that they came in sight of the returning squad.

They at once went into camp, and when their half-famished and tired comrades rode up, coming from the desert, they had a good breakfast awaiting them.

The two squads greeted each other with cheers and the haggard faces of those who had been over forty hours without food told how they had suffered.

But though he let his men return, Lieutenant Tompkins, who was the senior officer of the troop that both squads came from, told Lieutenant Peyton that he would go on with the fresh men, while he, who had lately had a sick attack, should return to the fort.

After a rest of two hours, and a good breakfast, the handsome young officer placed himself at the head of the fresh troopers, and with a farewell to their comrades, they rode on toward the desert, Buffalo Bill riding in advance.

"We will push on to the motte to-night, Cody, and camp there, and to-morrow follow the trail of the fugitive from there, for I will not give up the pursuit until I capture him, or know that he has gone to his death in the desert," said Lieutenant Tompkins.

CHAPTER VI.

FOUND.

THE squad descended the range, from the shelter of the trees, going down upon the burning, treeless plain, and held on between the cliffs upon the one side and the canyon on the other, to the desert.

Riding on to the side of Buffalo Bill, Lieutenant Tompkins said:

"Have you ever been far out into this Arizona desert, Cody?"

"Yes, lieutenant, I penetrated it once to solve a mystery of a fertile valley said to be in the center."

"That was some time before you came to the fort."

"Oh, yes, I have heard of that, and that you found a band of gold-diggers there who kept everybody away?"

"Yes, sir."

"It is a very dangerous trail, to push into this desert, I can well understand from my short experience with it."

"It is death to the man not acquainted with the geography of its surroundings, and

carrying no food and water, to penetrate it beyond the reach of his vision, where he can keep the mountains in sight, for after we leave the motte ahead it is sand, rock, and barren waste, with no water, for the holes that have water at times, are now dried up."

"Yet the sergeant went straight out into its desolation."

"Yes, lieutenant, for he felt that sure death was behind him, and a chance of life ahead."

"You have no belief in finding him, I am sure?"

"Yes I have, sir."

"His body?"

"That is it, sir, for though he got a fresh horse, as you told me, in the motte, I had but little food in my haversack, and there is no chance of his standing this terrible heat and suffering long."

"You expect then that he will either drop on the trail, or return."

"He'll not return, lieutenant, for he is not that kind of a man, but push on to death rather."

"Was it not strange about his finding that horse, Cody, in the motte, at the very moment your horse could go no further?"

"Some men are born for good luck, Lieutenant Tompkins, and the escape, and finding that horse leads me to think he is one."

"I agree with you, but do you think you can follow his trail over the desert?"

"Oh yes, unless we have a wind-storm to drift the sand, and that is not likely."

"Well, I like the fellow, and I believe that he had more reason for killing Sergeant Mayhew than he would admit to the court-martial."

"Weston is a strange man, Cody, and I have an idea that he has seen far better days and is a man of education."

"I have thought the same, sir; but there looms the motte, and if he has been driven back we will find him there."

"For my part I hope not, though I shall leave nothing undone to capture him," said the kind-hearted lieutenant.

The motte now loomed up ahead, and two horses pushed on without urging, their instinct telling them that there was rest, water and grass ahead of them.

The heat was intense, there was a glare of fire it seemed, rising from the desert, and both men and animals were suffering.

When at last the shade of the motte was reached there was an instant relief, but even there the burning sun caused the heat to be almost unbearable.

The horses were soon feeding at will, and the men, throwing themselves down in the shade near the spring, awaited for night to come on before making an effort to cook their supper.

After dark they had a light meal and sought rest, for they were to make a start early enough in the morning to bring them to the spot where they had given up the trail before, for from there on Buffalo Bill would have to follow the trail of a single horse.

With cooked food, canteens filled, and orders not to touch a drop without permission, the pursuing soldiers made an early start and reached the spot where the single trail of the fugitive held on just as the sun rose and cast its burning rays over the desert.

Ahead, and alone Buffalo Bill followed the dim trail at a pace that he knew the horses could stand, yet swifter than that at which he thought the fugitive had gone.

The trail led directly in a straight line for miles, then swerved a little to the right, and not long after began to go on a zig-zag course.

The scout halted, and when Lieutenant Tompkins rode up he was examining the ground attentively.

"Have you lost the trail, Cody?"

"No, sir; I have found another."

"What do you make out of that?"

"Simply that both trails were made by the same horse."

"Then he has doubled upon his track."

The scout made no reply, and a peculiar look passed over his face, while he said:

"It may be, sir, and yet I doubt it."

"Well, you have good eyes, for I only now and then can see a track."

"Yes, sir, and that track tells the story," and Buffalo Bill led the way once more.

An hour after a large rock towered up standing alone out in the desert, and toward this landmark the trail ran.

As they neared it all saw an object lying at the base of the rock, and approaching closer, Buffalo Bill said:

"We have found him, Lieutenant Tompkins, for there lies both man and horse."

"Dead?"

"Yes, sir."

CHAPTER VII.

A GRAVE IN THE DESERT.

THE men all approached the solitary rock in the desert, which stood out like a monument to the lead, with an air of reverence.

They had admired the sergeant, whom they knew to be brave to recklessness, of a generous nature, though stern and fond of being alone.

The man he had killed they did not like.

He was wont to speak of his having been born a gentleman and rich, and that fraud had deprived him of his fortune.

He was overbearing and at times possessed a very ugly temper.

What had passed between Weston and his brother sergeant, no one knew, more than to hear angry words and see one man fall, when a bayonet in the hands of the other was driven through his breast.

A cocked revolver was found upon Manton Mayhew, and Sergeant Wallace Weston had said that he killed his brother sergeant because the two quarreled and he was in a rage.

More than this he would not say, and the court-martial that tried him could not get him to, and so he was found guilty of murder and sentenced to be shot.

The men remembered his bearing, they recalled that he had not weakened through all, and when the chance offered itself to escape he had daringly made the effort.

Now as they approached his body, lying by the rock, they were sad at the fate that had been his, yet mentally decided that it had better be thus than an execution.

As Buffalo Bill rode by the side of Lieutenant Tompkins toward the rock, and then came within a hundred yards of it, a pack of snarling coyotes were seen to suddenly dash out of the shadow and go across the plain with a lop natural to them, glancing back as they did so in fury at being driven from their prey.

"The cowardly brutes! They have already been tearing him to pieces," said Buffalo Bill, and raising his rifle he fired several shots at long range.

Each shot brought down a coyote and this sent the others off at a speed which only those brutes can make when really frightened.

As the troop neared the rock they beheld horse and rider lying near together.

Both had been the prey of the desert dogs, for the face and hands of the fugitive sergeant had been torn beyond recognition, and the sharp teeth of the pack had slashed the animal's flanks in many places.

The soldier's clothing was badly torn and the saddle, bridle and trappings, were still upon the horse.

The horse was soon stripped of his trappings, and the blankets of the scout, attached to the saddle, served as shroud and coffin for the dead sergeant, who was wrapped tightly in them, and tied securely with the stake-rope.

With their sabers the soldiers began to dig a grave, close under the rock, Buffalo Bill remarking that, when the grave was half filled in, the huge stone, by their united strength, could be rolled upon it and become a monument, while it would also save the body from being torn up by the coyotes.

This plan was followed, and Lieutenant Tompkins, with uncovered head, repeated the burial service for the dead over the unfortunate sergeant, whose life had been a mystery to his companions, and who had met such a sad end.

"Poor fellow! He simply starved to death, and, with the heat, could stand it no longer," said the scout.

"But, why should his horse have died so soon, Cody?"

"We do not know how fresh or used up the animal was, lieutenant. In fact, he may

have been half dead when found by Sergeant Weston."

"True."

"And then, too, I noticed that one chamber of my revolver, the one lying near the sergeant's hand, was empty."

"You think that he may have shot his horse, then?"

"It might be, in a fit of despair, not wishing to die alone, he may have killed the animal."

"Poor fellow! But, is it not strange that coyotes should be so far from water, Cody?"

"Those little cowardly dogs, sir, have a wonderful scent for food, and an instinct, too, that is remarkable. They may have followed the sergeant, feeling sure that he was going to his death."

"Which is quite probable. But come, we have followed Weston to the end, and must be on our return, for I have no desire to see any of my men and horses go under."

"It is growing late, yet we must push on to the water to-night, Cody."

"By all means, sir, for both men and horses' sake. I can measure the strain upon them here on the desert."

"Yes, and I can feel it," answered the lieutenant.

The heads of the horses were at once turned upon the homeward trail, and they needed no urging on their way, for they knew that their destination was the motte, where water and grass awaited them.

Backward glances were cast by the soldiers at the grave in the desert, marked by the solitary rock, and all felt sad at the fate of the man who had died there alone and in suffering.

The night camp was made in the motte, and the following night, just at sunset, the party returned to the fort.

Lieutenant Tompkins at once made his report, and Sergeant Wallace Weston was put down as dead, while the young officer was thanked by the major for his services, and Buffalo Bill also for having guided the party to where the trail of the fugitive ended.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RUN FOR LIFE.

THE man who had so bravely made a strike for his life, when all hope seemed gone, when he was surrounded, as it were by a couple of hundred men, when death's shadow was falling upon him as he stood at the head of the open grave dug to receive his body, had calculated well his chances of escape and quickly determined to risk them.

The arrival of Buffalo Bill, his horse standing near, the open side of the square, the stream and timber beyond, were all seen in a flash, and then came the thought that failure could only bring death, a volley and all would be over.

So it was that Sergeant Wallace Weston made the desperate rush for life, bounding to the side of the scout's horse, and with a mighty leap throwing himself into the saddle.

He forced the horse over the bank, arose from the depths and went swiftly toward the other shore.

Turning in his saddle he wondered why he had not been greeted with a volley, and then remembered that the guns of the soldiers were unloaded, that no one would fire without orders, that the men would have to be taken out of their position in square and formed in line, muskets loaded and then fire.

Military discipline had saved him thus far.

Then he saw Buffalo Bill level his revolver and pull trigger.

He ducked in his saddle, for he well knew the scout's deadly aim.

The shot falling near him in the water, another on the bank, and each bullet flying wide, he said grimly:

"He would not kill me—he aimed to miss me."

"I'll never forget brave Buffalo Bill for that."

A few hundred yards had been gone over and the man realized that the horse he rode was far from fresh, and he recalled that the scout had made a hard ride to try and get a reprieve for him.

But his chances were desperate and the horse must suffer to save him.

He forced him ahead then as hard as he dared, for he knew that it would not be half an hour before cavalry would be upon his track, and if he could escape them until nightfall, in the darkness he might be able to completely elude pursuit.

He held straight on until he reached the range of hills, which he crossed and descending headed for the desert.

"They will not follow me there," he murmured, and examining the outfit of the scout he found that he had with him a couple of days' rations at least, a canteen of water, roll of blankets, with the rifle and ammunition in plenty.

As he reached the desert he saw dark objects on the slope of the hill, visible in the rays of the setting sun, and he knew that they were troopers in pursuit of him.

"They can follow me no further than the desert, for then they must halt, and I will have a night's start of them, even if my horse fails me and I am on foot," he murmured, as he rode along in the gathering gloom of coming night.

With the heat of day no longer oppressing him, and a drink of water just as he left the hills, the horse rallied somewhat, and was urged steadily along out upon the desert.

Proceeding in a walk, after darkness came the fugitive continued his flight, until the moon rose and lighted his way.

He could see nothing of his pursuers, and at last decided to halt for the night, out of mercy for the noble animal he rode.

He bathed the nostrils of the horse to refresh him, spread a blanket upon the sand, and grasping the rein lay down to rest, after eating a small piece of deer-meat and a cracker.

Worn out with all he had passed through he did not awake, as he had expected, at midnight, but slept on until the dawn was near at hand.

Then he awoke with a start, looked about him for a moment and all the horror of his situation flashed upon him.

"I must get away from here, for even now they may be near me."

"Poor horse, without food and water, and day upon us, you indeed will have a hard time of it."

Quickly rolling up his blanket, and throwing it over the saddle he mounted and rode on, to soon discover that the troopers were not far away, and coming upon his trail like men who meant to capture him, suffer what they might in the effort to do so.

CHAPTER IX.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

THE unfortunate man, under sentence of death, and hunted down by his comrades in arms, set forward with teeth set and stern face.

Ahead of him loomed up green trees and the presence of water and grass for his horse.

Was it one of those mirages of which he had so often heard, luring the traveler on to death?

He half-feared so until he saw that his horse also beheld the green trees, scented the water and pushed on more rapidly with ears bent forward and every now and then giving a low neigh of delight.

"It will save you, good horse, for you are hardly able to bear me now," said the fugitive, and he urged his horse on, for his own lips were parched, his throat dry and he had eaten nothing since the few mouthfuls the evening before.

At last the motte, the green oasis in the desert was reached, and rushing up to the little stream flowing from the spring the horse shoved his nose deep down into its cool depths.

As the rider sprung from the saddle he uttered a cry of delight, for there, not a hundred yards away, was a fine animal gazing at him with a curious look, as though wondering who and what he was.

The man at once started toward the strange horse, and was glad that he did not run from him.

He succeeded in catching him, and leading him up to the noble animal that had borne him

so long a distance and so well, quickly transferred the saddle and bridle from him to his fresh mount.

Filling his canteen then with cool water, and with an affectionate caress to the most noble animal he was leaving, he mounted and rode away from the spring.

Halting at the last grassy plot he hastily pulled enough for a small feed, wrapped it in his blanket and mounting rode on once more, and just as the troopers were coming rapidly toward the motte.

"This horse is fresh, their horses are dead beat, and Fate, after providing me with this fresh mount, will not allow me to be re-taken."

As he so mused aloud a different look came over his face, the expression of stern resolve to bear up against despair faded away, and he had the appearance of one filled with hope for the present.

He looked back and saw that the troopers rode into the motte, that they halted there, and after a short rest a few came on.

But he had no fear now apparently and rode on his course, though at times he seemed to hesitate as to which way he should go.

When darkness came he again camped upon the desert, giving his horse half of the grass he had brought for him, and a few swallows of water from his canteen.

When dawn broke he was again in the saddle, and after riding for several hours beheld a rock ahead.

The horse seemed to wish to go directly to it, and he had observed several times that the animal was inclined to go his own way.

Now he rode directly for the large boulder, neighing a couple of times, and as he approached it he saw a pack of coyotes go whining away.

"Coyotes away out here on the desert mean that they have found food there," he muttered, and when he rode up to the rock he made a startling discovery.

There lay the form of a man, clad in buckskin and miner's dress combined.

His hat was near, and he lay with his head upon his saddle, a blanket beneath him and a bridle and trappings near.

The face and hands of the man had been disfigured but slightly, showing that the coyotes had not long before found their game.

Raising his rifle he fired several shots, which sent the voracious brutes scattering far away over the desert.

Then he gave the balance of the grass he had with him to his horse, and unsaddled him, while he began to search the body of the man he had found dead there in the desert.

Unwrapping his blankets he discovered a buckskin roll, in which were a few trinkets, a watch, chain, ring and sleeve-buttons, with several photographs, and a map with a "key" attached to it.

There was a bundle of letters and some papers, all of which the fugitive glanced over carefully, and with varying expressions coming and going upon his face the while.

At last from his lips broke a wild, exultant shout, followed by a burst of laughter as he cried:

"By Heaven, but the star of my destiny is in the ascendant, for again has fortune favored me."

"Yes, this map and key, and these papers tell me where I can find untold wealth—where I can dig a fortune from the earth in bright, yellow gold!"

"This poor fellow has died here, starved to death, and as I live, I believe this is his horse which has strayed back to where he could find grass and water."

"Yes, for the animal would come in this direction, and this was his master!"

"Being dead, this poor piece of clay needs not the fortune I have found on his dead body;—no, it is mine, mine!"

"Ha! what thought is this that comes to me?"

"By Heaven I'll do it, and, if the troopers yet follow my trail, they will find my clothes on a body half devoured by coyotes, the scout's saddle, bridle and rifle, and the horse they saw me ride away from the motte lying dead by my side, for I must make the deceit a perfect one."

"Yes, Wallace Weston will be reported as having died upon the desert, while in re-

ality he will be far from here, digging a fortune out of the earth.

"Ha! ha! ha! I am now defiant, for I was not born to die as this poor wretch has."

With this he drew off his uniform and the clothes of the dead man, and quickly made the exchange, taking from his pocket a small pair of shears and cutting away the beard, which he did not wish to betray him.

When all was ready he took up the saddle and trappings of the dead man, and raising his rifle shot the horse that had served him so well.

"It is cruel, but the brute must die for the human," he said in a low tone, and then walked rapidly away from the spot.

Glancing back when far away he smiled grimly as he saw the coyotes sneaking back to devour their prey.

CHAPTER X

IN TERRIBLE PERIL.

THE fugitive soldier walked away from the rock in the gathering gloom, carrying with him his load of the saddle, bridle and outfit of the man he had found dead.

"If found by the men who are pursuing me they will bury him, and that will end my career to the world."

"I would like to put the poor fellow in a grave, but then he serves me too well to permit of that."

"What a coincidence that he should be just my size, and with his beard cut off not unlike me, he will readily pass for me."

"Ah me! what is before me now, I wonder?"

"After all that has come up in my favor, I cannot but believe that the future holds more in store for me than has the past."

"Now let me see! Which way will I go?"

"Why, back the way I came, of course, for I can find that oasis in the desert that served me so well before, and from there to the mountains can be made in a day's journey, though I must approach them by night, so as not to be seen by any one who may be in the hills."

"Then, too, the Land of Gold is in that direction, and thither I go now, for there lies my future."

"Somewhere I will pick up a horse, so I will carry this rig, heavy as it is."

"Now, turning my face upon the past, I front the future and all that it has in store for me."

Thus he mused, as he stood in the desert, with the moon rising to light his way.

Having decided, he took his course, from the rising moon showing him the points of the compass, and set off upon the back trail.

Walking as he was, he knew that he could hide where horsemen could not, and he could hear the tramp of cavalry far away.

His tracks would make no impression, so his trail could not be followed.

On he went over the moonlit desert, keeping up a steady tramp until midnight, when he ate sparingly of the little food he had secured with the scout's haversack, and took a few swallows of water.

With the saddle, bridle, lariat, rifle and belt of arms of the dead miner, the canteen, blankets and ammunition he had a weight of sixty pounds to carry.

But he was a powerfully-built man and walked along without seeming effort.

At last, having kept up a brisk walk all night, he saw the dark shadows ahead that marked the outline of the little clump of timber in the desert, with its cool spring to refresh him.

He walked more briskly now, anxious to enter its shelter while it was yet dark, for he knew not but that his pursuers might be camped there.

The sun however rose before he reached the timber, and as he gazed into its shadows he halted.

After all he had passed through were his pursuers lurking there for him?

If so, they saw him and were awaiting his coming.

To escape now would be impossible, if he was seen, so he would go boldly on and face the ordeal, whatever it might be.

So on he went, with firm tread, stern face and ready to face the worst.

He entered the timber, his heart in his throat, as it felt to him, yet calm of mien.

He had more to live for now than ever, for he held in his possession the secret of a mine which the papers attached to it said was a fortune of gold.

Must he lose all now?

But not a sound broke the stillness, not a leaf stirred, not a moving thing was in sight.

Straight to the spring he went and quenched his thirst, and then he ate his breakfast, but partook very sparingly.

Bathing his feet and refreshing himself with the cool water, he walked over to where there was a thicket and creeping in among the cedars spread his blankets and lay down to rest.

Worn out he slept soundly, and he heard not the tramp of horses, but was awakened by the sound of voices.

He half arose with a start to see a squad of cavalry riding into the timber.

Leading them, as guide, came Buffalo Bill; and an officer, whom he recognized as Lieutenant Tompkins followed with the troopers in his rear.

To try to escape would result in instant discovery, and yet it seemed hardly possible that he could avoid detection if they remained there long.

Scarcely daring to breathe he lay flat upon the ground and awaited the result of their coming.

He heard them talking distinctly, and his name was mentioned.

The horses were turned loose, and this indicated a stay of at least some hours.

Fires were built to cook food, and the weary men sought shady places to rest, but not one came into the thicket, though they threw themselves near by, in its shade.

Fortunately the thicket kept off what little breeze there was blowing and they avoided it, anxious to get what air they could.

Lying flat upon his back the hunted man, drenched with perspiration, his heart beating violently, lay as still as death, awaiting life or death, as it might be to him.

CHAPTER XI.

THE GOLD-HUNTER.

THE hours dragged by like days to Wallace Weston as he lay there in the thicket, with his comrades not two hundred feet from him, some coming near enough to have seen him, had attention been attracted into the cedars, which, fortunately for him, it was not.

At last the shadows grew longer, the rays of the sunlight gilded the tree-tops, then that faded away and twilight settled over all, followed by darkness.

The hunted sergeant breathed more freely then, but yet knew that he was not safe, not until the soldiers left the thicket.

He heard the conversation between Buffalo Bill and the lieutenant, as to what was best to be done, toward pursuing him, and then knew that the soldiers had sought their blankets for the night.

Still he dared not go to sleep, and only felt that he was able to change his position, for he had been lying flat upon his back for hours.

Again the hours dragged along into a tedious length of time, and it appeared an age to him before he heard the call for the men to saddle up and be ready to start.

The moon was riding high in the heavens now, and he could see the troopers moving about and at last form in line awaiting the command to mount and start on their way.

When at last he saw Buffalo Bill ride away, the lieutenant and his men following, he could hardly refrain from giving a shout of triumph.

He had not eaten a mouthful since he had thrown himself down to rest, and his canteen lay some yards away and he dared not make an effort to get it, so he was suffering for both food and water.

The moment the troopers rode away he arose and reconnoitered carefully, to see that none had remained.

He then arose, gathered up his things, and went to the spring, where he quenched his thirst, after which he ate again sparingly of the little food he had left.

Refilling his canteen with cool water he

shouldered his belongings and started at a brisk step away from the timber, taking the same trail by which he had come.

The fear came to him that the pursuers might give him up, once they got some distance from the timber and felt the full heat of the desert, and for them to return would be to overtake him.

But he had an hour or more before daylight came, and had made a long distance in that time.

The sun rose but still he pressed on, for the goal he sought was among the mountains ahead, which looked so near yet were so far away.

On, on he trudged, feeling now that he must approach the mountains by day, with the danger behind him, for of the two dangers he must choose the least.

With a bite of food now and then, a frequent swallow of water from his canteen, and not daring to halt for rest, fearing his limbs would become stiff and painful.

The sun at last disappeared behind the mountains and yet the mountains were miles away.

All trace of the timber in his rear had long since disappeared, and he knew that he had tramped many a long mile; but hope of shelter and safety lay before him and so on he went.

At last he reached the slope, climbing the foot-hills, and toward midnight had reached the mountain range.

His path lighted by the moon he went on until he came to a mountain stream, and then seeking a secluded spot he spread his blanket, ate a little food, and hardly able to stand lay down to sleep.

In an instant almost he was fast asleep, and when he awoke the sun was shining in his face.

Plunging into the stream, after a good bath he felt refreshed, and the last of his food was eaten with a relish.

Then he shouldered his traps once more and pressed on, on, wending his steps toward a region which his knowledge of the frontier told him no one went near, the Grand Canyon of the Colorado, of which wonderful tales were told around the camp-fires, weird stories of a strange country which no white man dared penetrate, and which the Indians said was the abode of evil spirits.

He knew that as he went on there was no danger of being pursued in that direction, that all danger from those who had been his comrades lay behind him, and that what danger there was ahead he would not worry about until he had to face it.

Suddenly he saw crossing his trail ahead a fawn, feeding as it went, all unconscious of his presence.

Quickly his rifle sprung to his shoulder, the flash and the report followed, and the deer dropped dead.

With food at hand he built a fire and soon enjoyed a hearty meal, after which he still pressed on until he came to a hill-top which gave him a view of a vast expanse of country with the Grand Canyon of the Colorado visible far away in the distance.

A cheer burst from his lips at the sight, and he cried in exultant tones:

"There lies my Promised Land!"

"In yonder Grand Canyon is the gold-mine I seek, the treasure that is to make me a rich man."

And there he stood gazing upon the wonderful scene until the shadows of night fell about him.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SOLITARY CAMP.

THE morning dawned grand and beautiful, and the Gold-Hunter arose from his blankets and gazed about him with a look of admiration as he beheld the scene.

Suddenly there attracted his eye a column of smoke floating upward from the timber bordering the rim of the mighty chasm, a mountain split in twain, that marked what is known as the "Grand Canyon," the most wonderful of Nature's work.

"What does that smoke mean, I wonder?" muttered the Gold-Hunter.

"Indians do not go there, I have heard Buffalo Bill and others say, so it must be white men."

"But who?"

"The man whose clothes I have on, whose map and belongings I have, certainly went there, and found a gold-mine, too."

"His diary says that he neither saw Indian or pale-face the year that he was in the Grand Canyon, and so I must be very cautious, and see just who I am to meet."

"His papers also direct me to where he left a *cache* containing several months' provisions, and other things that will be useful, and I must follow the directions on the map and find them; but first let me go to see what yonder smoke holds in store for me."

Eating the cold deer-meat left over from his supper the night before, for he dared not build a fire to cook more, the Gold Hunter started on his way once more, toward the curling smoke, all of a dozen miles away.

In that pure air walking is but little effort, and he made good progress until he reached the timberland, above which he had seen the column of smoke ascending.

Then he went forward very cautiously, having taken his bearings of the locality, so that he could find the camp without trouble, and at the same time keep out of view himself.

Reaching an open space in the timber he beheld the camp upon a hill-top, and saw that the fire was still burning.

From the nature of the ground about it, Wallace Weston was convinced that the camp had a canyon at the back of it, and with the open space in front, was well protected against surprise.

The canyon was therefore his best way to get near to it unseen, and he accordingly flanked along through the timber, keeping well out of sight, until he came to where the hill broke off abruptly.

Here he saw the canyon, which his knowledge of woodcraft told him was the one that ran up in the rear of the camp.

Up this he went, the sides gradually growing steeper, until he had gone fully a mile.

There he halted, deposited his traps and rifle, and began to climb up the steep sides, the top of the cliff being all of a hundred feet in height.

It was a dangerous and tedious climb, but he at last reached the top and peered over carefully.

His face changed color instantly at what he beheld.

There was the camp, for he had calculated well, not twenty-five feet from him.

There was a wicky-up there, as though the camp was not one of a night, and a couple of horses were staked out not far distant.

The fire was still smoldering, and near it lay a huge dog with a most savage-looking face.

But the animal was asleep, and the wind being favorable to the Gold-Hunter, he did not observe his presence so near, or scent him.

"There is a customer to look out for, though I never yet saw the dog I was afraid of."

"Still he looks ugly, and he guards the camp."

There, clinging to the cliff, and peering over it, the sergeant took in all there was about the camp, and was preparing to crawl over the rim of rock and enter it, when he saw a movement in the wicky-up.

"Ah! there is some one there, after all."

"Well, I must face whoever it is, for if a white man, I hardly have anything to fear."

So saying, he drew himself up over the edge of the cliff, and with revolver in hand, cautiously approached the camp.

He had gone but a few steps when the eyes of the dog opened, and with a savage yelp of surprise and anger, he bounded toward the intruder, who saw that he had a very dangerous brute to deal with.

But he did not flinch, did not show the slightest sign of fear of the savage animal, appearing like one who held his salvation in his own hands, and was well aware of the fact.

"With a voice that rung out sternly he cried:

"Down, you devil! down, sir!"

The dog halted, looked at the intruder curiously, met the unflinching gaze fixed upon him, and realized that he had met his match.

Instantly he dropped his head, giving only a vicious growl as though still struggling to terrify the one who sought to subdue him.

Quickly the soldier stepped toward him, gave him a kick, and said sternly:

"Down, sir!"

The dog dropped at his feet, wholly subdued, just as a voice came from the shadow of the wicky-up, crying:

"My God! who are you?"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MINER'S SECRET.

The voice was that of a man, and the words came as in intense surprise, while there was a pathos in them as though the speaker was suffering either in mind or body.

With half a dozen strides, still holding his revolver ready, the soldier stepped to the wicky-up, the dog trotting now humbly at his knees, and completely subdued.

He saw lying on the blankets spread under the shelter the form of a man, his face pale and haggard, and his hands and feet securely bound.

His face was bearded, his hair long and unkempt, and his appearance seedy, for his dress, that of a miner, and his boots and hat were worn out almost.

"And I ask the same question—who are you?" said Wallace Weston impressively, as he gazed down upon him.

"I am one in distress, one over whom the shadow of death has fallen, to soon end all."

"I am a poor unfortunate, held a prisoner here by one whose greed for gold is far greater than his humanity."

The words were uttered with evident effort, and the eyes of the speaker were fixed upon the intruder into the camp, who stood gazing at him in wonder and pity.

"How did you get here and not be torn to pieces by that savage brute?" asked the man in the wicky-up, as the other did not speak.

"I do not fear dogs."

"But you are known to him?"

"Oh, no, though he now knows me as his master—see—"

"Down, sir!"

The dog obediently dropped at the soldier's feet, while the one in the wicky-up said:

"Wonderful! that brute is my guard, and would tear me to pieces did I attempt to leave this spot."

"Who are you, that possesses such power over a brute?"

After a moment of hesitation the answer came:

"I am a Gold-Hunter; by name Andrew Seldon."

"And I too was a Gold-Hunter, and came here with one I deemed my friend in search of the precious metal."

"I was a geologist, had experience as a prospector, and he who now holds me a prisoner, profited by my knowledge, and when at last I struck it rich, found a mine, he showed the cloven foot, believing that he could go to it."

"He shot me down, as he believed killing me, and at once went in search of the find I had made, guided by what I had told him."

"But in vain he searched, he could not find the gold, and cursing himself for being so hasty, he returned to camp to find that his bullet had not proven fatal."

"Instantly he threw himself upon his knees by my side, begged me to forgive him, said that he was mad, and knew not what he did."

"Fool that I was, I believed that he was sorry and forgave him. Most tenderly he cared for me during weeks of suffering until at last, a few days ago, I was able to go about."

"Then he asked me to take him to my mine."

"I refused to do so at that time, asking him to wait until I was a little stronger, and at once he showed his true nature again."

"Frankly he told me that he would kill me unless I told him where the gold was."

"I refused to do so, and so, making that huge brute hold me at bay, he bound me hand and foot, and so I have been for a week."

"Each day he leaves camp in search of the gold, and that dog is my guard, while he

has told me that if he does not find it by next Sunday, three days away now, he will kill me, and he is one to keep his word."

Wallace Weston had listened attentively to the words of the sufferer; then he bent over and quickly unbound the lariat that held him so securely.

"You are in no danger, now, for you are a free man, and can meet your cruel foe upon equal terms."

"Would that I could, but I am as weak and helpless as a child."

"Then I shall protect you, and your enemy will have me to deal with."

"What is your name, may I ask?"

"Lucas Langley."

"Well, friend Langley, I will remain here in the wicky-up until your enemy comes and meet him. Will you tell me who, and what he is?"

"His name is Hugh Mayhew, though he was known in the camps as Black Heart Bill, for he was a desperado of the worst type."

"I was a fool to come with him on this gold trail, but then I had saved his life and he was always most friendly toward me though a terror to others, and I trusted him; but now, from his own lips I know that he wished me to come along to find gold for him, which, when found, meant my death—but, sir, you are as white as death!" and the miner gazed with amazement into the face of the man who had told him his name was Andrew Seldon.

With an effort he recovered himself and said, though his voice was hoarse with suppressed feeling:

"Yes, it is from your recalling a name I heard long ago, and that I can never forget."

"Hugh Mayhew, you said?"

"Yes, sir, that is his real name, though, as I told you, he is better known in this wild region as Black Heart Bill."

"A name well fitted to him and his evil life, for I know him, and I tell you now, Mr. Lucas Langley, that I also have a score to settle with Black Heart Bill, and that means that it shall be his life or mine," and the face of the speaker showed the miner that he was in deadly earnest.

CHAPTER XIV.

BLACK HEART BILL.

The miner was deeply impressed by the words and manner of the one who had come before him almost as an apparition, and was there, as he said to protect him, when he was unable, from his long suffering from his wound, and being bound, to help himself.

"You really know this man Mayhew, then, Pard Seldon?" asked the miner.

"I do know him only too well, for I met him years ago; but we will not speak of that now, as I desire to be ready for his return."

"When do you expect him back to camp?"

"In an hour or so, for his time for returning varies, as he comes back to dinner sometimes, and then again not until night."

"Well, when he comes I will be ready for him, and you had better keep up the appearance of being still bound."

"I will do as you say, sir."

"I will give you one of my revolvers, and—"

"My own are there, for you see my belt hanging on the tree yonder."

"I will get it for you, and you remain in the wicky-up, while I will hide yonder behind the roots of that tree which has blown down."

"Yes."

"When he returns to camp I will have my eye on him, and hear what he has to say to you."

"At the proper moment I will appear—"

"And kill him?"

"I will not shoot him down as he deserves, but give him a chance for his life."

"No, no, for he is the deadliest of shots, full of nerve, has plenty of courage and is merciless."

"Still I will meet him on equal terms; but how are you with a revolver?"

"I am a good shot."

"Well, if he kills me then your own chance for life is to shoot him down, and a few days' rest will make you able to travel, and you can return to your mine, or go where you please."

"Thank you, pard; but let me tell you that though I would be merciful to any one else, yet it will not do with Black Heart Bill to give him any chance whatever, for it will be fatal to you."

"Still I will do so, for I would not murder even that man, vile as he is."

"From which direction does he come?"

"From down the valley yonder."

"And he is off prospecting now?"

"Yes, for my mine, for he looks only for that now."

"Have you anything to eat in camp?"

"Yes, over by the fire you will find plenty that was left from breakfast: coffee, venison steak and hoe-cake."

The Gold-Hunter went to the fire, set the coffee-pot upon the coals, and found in the frying-pan a good steak and some bread.

He ate heartily and felt much refreshed, after which he returned to the wicky-up and continued to talk with the miner until the latter said quickly:

"He is coming."

"See, that brute is pricking up his ears."

"All right," said the Gold-Hunter with the utmost *sang froid*, "I will be ready for him."

"Throw that rope about your ankles and wrists, as though you were still bound, and I will seek my hiding-place."

With this the Gold-Hunter quickly sought the spot he had selected, a hole made by a tree having been blown up by the roots, and where there was a secure hiding-place, not twenty feet from the wicky-up.

The dog sat out near the fire, his ears pricked up and his eyes watching down the valley, where there soon came into view a horseman, riding at a gallop.

"It's Black Heart Bill, as I thought."

"That dog always scents him a long way off," said Lucas Langley from his place in the brush shelter.

"All right, I am ready for him," came the quiet response, and the eyes of the Gold-Hunter were fixed upon the coming horseman, as he peered through a hole in the mass of interwoven roots.

At last the horseman came clearly into view, and the Gold-Hunter saw that he was well mounted and equipped, carrying, in addition to his belt of arms, a rifle across his saddle.

The horse came along at a lope, straight for camp, and arriving near, the rider dismounted, took off the saddle and bridle and staked the animal out near the other two animals.

Walking briskly up toward the camp the man leant his rifle against a tree and turned toward the wicky-up.

He was a man above the medium height, well built, and his movements were quick and decided.

He wore a long beard, his hair fell upon his broad shoulders, and his face was darkly bronzed, handsome, expressive and yet one to dread, for in it lurked a look of utter recklessness, while there was a cruel curl to his lip and an evil glitter in his eyes.

He was dressed in buckskin, top-boots and large-rimmed slouch hat, and at a glance, if one did not study his evil face closely, looked to be a magnificent creature, the very picture of a border hero.

But one studying his face for a moment, would fear, not like or respect, Black Heart Bill, the man who had won the name from his brother miners of being a man without a heart, pity, or a noble impulse.

Such was the man whom the Gold-Hunter had voluntarily agreed to face in a struggle for life or death.

CHAPTER XV.

THE DESPERADO'S THREAT.

THE man's face, as he strode toward the wicky-up, where Lucas Langley, his victim lay, pretending to be still bound, was full of malignancy, and his eyes lurid with an evil resolve.

"See here, Langley, I have hunted over every foot of land which you have been able to prospect since we came into this country, and I can find not the slightest trace of gold or silver, only some rich copper ore."

"Now I came to this country expecting to find gold through your knowledge of minerals, and I know, from the few nug-

gets you brought into camp that you struck it rich."

"You are right, I did; but what the find will pan out when worked I do not know," was the quiet answer.

"Well, I'll take chances on its being a rich find, and I am willing to go halves with you if you take me to it."

"Yes, go halves until the opportunity offers to shoot me dead."

"I am tired of longer delay, and I swear to you, by Heaven, Langley, that I will kill you within ten minutes, if you do not swear to mount your horse and guide me to that gold."

"I will not do so, to be killed by you as soon as you know the secret."

"You refuse?"

"I do."

"Well, I'll give you the ten minutes, and if you do not consent then, I will put a bullet through your heart as you lie there."

"And never find it then."

"I'll be better off, at least with you out of the way, for my provisions will last longer, and I can change my camp at will, not being tied down by your being unable to go."

"You placed me here by trying to kill me."

"Yes, and curse you, you would not die."

"You have as many lives as a cat," and the man took another glance at the watch he held in his hand, while he continued, speaking with the utmost deliberation:

"It is now just ten minutes to one o'clock, and when the hands point to one I will kill you."

"If you decide at the last minute to weaken, call out, but be quick, for I will have my finger on the trigger to pull it."

"Would you shoot a man now prostrated by your shooting him down without mercy two months ago, a man bound hand and foot, and wholly in your power?"

"Of course I would."

"Have you forgotten my record as Black Heart Bill?"

"Alas, no, I believe you are capable of any crime."

"You should know me, when you saw what I did in the mines."

"I remember but too well."

"Then do not hesitate, unless you wish to be shot, and left here for the coyotes to pick your bones."

"I care not what becomes of my body after I am dead; but I did hope for some mercy from a man whose life I saved at the risk of my own."

"Bah! what care I for sentiment?"

"My race were not born chicken-hearted, and I will not be the one to show that I am not worthy of my ancestors by showing the white feather when it is only a man's life that my bullet snuffs out like a candle," and the man gave a bitter, mocking laugh.

"Well, I shall not weaken, Black Heart Bill, so do your worst."

"I will; but I will be merciful, for I will give you a chance to pray, and I would like to hear a man on the eve of death praying for his soul's safety."

"Will you free my hands?"

"No!"

"Why not?"

"I wish it."

"You wish to clasp them in prayer, eh?"

"Well, that is simply a fancy to clasp the hands and bow the head, for it does not make the words any more binding."

"No, you shall die at the end of your prayer, and the crack of my revolver will emphasize the Amen."

"Black Heart Bill, you are more of a brute than that savage dog of yours!"

"Why not, for I have the human brain with the brute nature to make me so."

"But your time is about up, so say your prayers, and remember that I will yet find your gold-mine and revel in your wealth."

"Come! pray if you intend to, for you are doomed to die within just two minutes," and the villain glanced at his watch once more and turned to step to the tree a few feet away, where he had hung his belt of arms when he came into camp.

But as he turned he heard the startling words:

"And you are doomed, Hugh Mayhew!"

"Hands up, quick! for I am as merciless as you are."

A startled cry broke from the lips of Hugh Mayhew, and his face became livid at hearing a strange voice behind him, when he had not beheld a human being with the exception of Lucas Langley and himself, within a hundred miles of where they were encamped.

Then, too, he beheld the tall form of the Gold-Hunter between him and his belt of arms, and knew that he was at his mercy, for a revolver, held in a hand as firm as a rock, with an eye glancing along the sights that did not quail, and the muzzle pointed directly at his heart, covered him, and something very like a moan of despair came from between his set teeth.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE GOLD-HUNTER'S DEMAND.

REALIZING that he was unarmed, and facing a revolver in the hands of a dangerous man, Black Heart Bill, with the training he had had on the border, did not hesitate to obey the command and raise his hands above his head.

"Does that satisfy you?" he growled.

"For the present, yes."

"By Heaven! but I know that face!" cried the desperado.

"Do you think you do?"

"I know it."

"If I am the one you think, then you must know how little claim you have on me for mercy, Hugh Mayhew."

"Ha! I knew I was not mistaken, for you have not a face to forget."

"Especially under the circumstances when you saw it last."

"Yes, they said you had not died as we supposed, but had recovered and left the country," and Black Heart Bill spoke rather to himself than to the man who had faced him, spoke as though he was recalling the past.

"No, I did not die, as many believed, but am alive and hold you at my mercy this time, Hugh Mayhew."

"You would not kill me in cold blood, would you?"

"If I did, it would be doing by you just as you would by me."

"I would at least give a man a chance for his life."

"You lie, for but two minutes ago you vowed to kill that poor man there, whom you had already shot down."

"It is false, for I shot him by accident, and I was only trying to frighten him into telling me something I wished to know."

"Again you lie, Hugh Mayhew, for if you shot him once in cold blood you would again, and you have a record of being merciless, while I happened to hear all that you said, listened to your threat from my hiding-place there, and had I not held you up your victim would now be a dead man."

"No, you should expect no mercy from me, Hugh Mayhew."

"Yet I do."

"You ask it?"

"Yes."

"You plead to me for mercy?"

"I can do nothing else."

"Well, you know what it is to be cornered, to have one have the drop on you."

"Yes, you now suffer as you have made others suffer, as you have made your victim feel, the man who saved your life at the risk of his own, the man who came to this country trusting you, believing that he had at least the hold of friendship upon you."

"How know you this?"

"Simply from his own lips, and now by your own admission that it is true."

"I owe him nothing."

"You square all debts by death, Mayhew; but yet I will show you mercy."

"I felt that you would."

"You judged me from being your opposite."

"Well, let us shake hands and be friends."

"Shake hands with you?" roared the Gold Hunter.

"I touch your hand?"

"By Heaven, but I'd rather place my hand upon the head of the most poisonous of reptiles, Hugh Mayhew."

"Oh, no, if I have to put my hand upon yours, it will be when I have killed you,

and I have to fold your hands in death across your coward heart, for when dead, then only will I not hate you."

The man had lost his calm manner, his voice quivered, his eyes flashed and he spoke with savage vehemence which caused his enemy, be his crime against him in the past what it might, to cower before him in fear.

"You said that you would spare me."

"I said that I would not kill you without mercy, that I would give you a chance for your life."

"What chance?"

"I will show you."

"Mr. Langley, come here, please."

To the horror of Black Heart Bill, Lucas Langley, his victim, whom he believed to be still bound, arose and came slowly toward the Gold-Hunter, carrying his revolver in his hand.

"Pard Langley, step off twenty paces, please, here on the level ground, mark each end, and also the center between them."

"You understand?"

"Perfectly."

"Place one of that man's revolvers at one end, one of mine at the other, looking at both to see that they are loaded and in perfect condition."

"Then, with your own revolver in hand, and cocked, take your stand near the center position."

"I will escort Mayhew to the starting point, both of us unarmed and facing each other."

"At your order:

"Right about wheel, forward, march, we both step off for our respective end of the twenty paces, going at a pace which you regulate by calling out aloud the numbers up to ten."

"I understand, sir, and will do as you say: but as this man is my foe, as he sought my life, and to rob me, had me come with him here to this weird land just to profit by my work and then to kill me, I feel that I, not you, should be the one to face him in this duel," said Lucas Langley.

"My dear friend, with all that this man, so justly named Black Heart Bill, has done to you, his crimes against me have been far more, and I alone am the one to face him now in what shall be a fight to the death," was the stern rejoinder of the sergeant, and he added:

"Now let this duel be fought."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DESPERADO'S LAST CHANCE.

THE situation there in that lone camp was a painful one, for there stood three men, one the foe of two of them, and the scene was soon to have the shadow of death fall upon it.

Black Heart Bill seemed to realize fully the situation of danger he had gotten himself into.

Where the sergeant had come from, or if he was really alone, he did not know.

But there in that wilderness, shunned by red-men and pale-faces alike, but which the greed for gold had caused a few only to penetrate, he had met one he had wronged in some cruel way in the past, one who was now holding him answerable for that wrong.

To do this the fugitive sergeant had said that he would risk his own life by giving him a chance to kill him.

That Black Heart Bill was at his mercy was certain, yet he appeared not to be the man to take advantage of the fact, but to risk life in his punishment of him.

Seeing how matters stood, Lucas Langley stepped up to the fugitive sergeant and said:

"I have told you, sir, that that man was a dead shot, and you do very wrong to risk your life against his."

"Better rather let him go."

"To hang on our trail and kill us both from ambush."

"No, you do not know him as I do, my friend."

"And you demand that he shall fight you this duel?"

"Certainly."

"But the tremendous risk to you?"

"Do you know I do not feel it to be so, for after what I have passed through I do not believe I am to die by that man's bullet,

in fact I am not at all troubled as to the result."

"Then I must arrange as you requested?"

"At once, please."

The miner moved slowly about, to obey, stepped off the twenty paces, marked each end, and the center with a rock, and placed one of Black Heart Bill's revolvers at one end, one of the sergeant's at the other.

Then he said:

"All is ready, so come to your positions."

The Gold-Hunter stepped briskly to his place, having put aside his other weapon, for Lucas Langley now held his revolver ready to fire upon him if he made any attempt to be tricky.

Black Heart Bill had stood like a man who felt that he had come to a chasm he could not cross.

His eyes had wandered down the valley to the rim that marked the towering banks of the Grand Canyon, and he had gazed into space with a far-away look as though he longed to pierce the Great Beyond.

He moved to his position mechanically, his bronzed face having a deathly pallor now, and he stood like one who obeyed because he could not help himself.

There they stood, the two splendid-looking men, unarmed, and back to back, their eyes upon their respective revolvers lying ten paces from them.

At one side near them Lucas Langley now took his position, and he looked weak, pale and anxious.

The Gold-Hunter was perfectly unmoved, save for the stern expression resting upon his mouth.

His position gave him a look down the bright sunlit valley to the Grand Canyon, and so on the Blue Buckskin Mountains beyond.

His outlook was a cheery one, if he could gain hope from that.

On the other hand, and it was by accident, Black Heart Bill faced the shadows, looking into the dark and heavy timber upon the other side of the camp.

The huge dog, which Black Heart Bill had very appropriately named Savage, seemed to realize with brute instinct, that something was going wrong, for he stood not far away, his tail drooped as though in fear, his eyes glancing from one to the other of the three men.

It was a scene that the actors therein could never forget, a scene made necessary from man's inhumanity to his fellow-man.

A silence that was painful rested upon all, until it was broken by the voice of Lucas Langley asking:

"Are you ready?"

The Gold-Hunter bowed, the desperado spoke.

He said:

"I cannot say nay, for you two are determined to murder me."

The sergeant wheeled upon him and said:

"Hugh Mayhew, if it be your lot to die, why must it be with a lie upon your lips, for am I not giving you an equal chance with myself?"

"There are two against one."

"It is not so, for I am taking the same chance that you do."

"If it were otherwise I would have shot you down, as your own conscience tells you that you deserve at my hands."

"That man is your friend."

"I hope that he acts for you as squarely as he does for me."

A sudden gleam came into the eyes of the desperado, as they rested upon the dog.

He saw a chance for life, and with a quick motion of his hand called, pointing to Lucas Langley:

"At him, Savage!"

"Take his throat in your iron jaws!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE BORDER DUEL.

At the command of his master, the ugly brute at once gave a savage growl, his hair stood up like bristles and there was no doubt but that he would have sprung upon the one who held the revolver, Lucas Langley, who might, or might not have killed him as he rushed toward him.

Then would the desperado have made a spring and seized his revolver, hoping to

bring down the sergeant before he could grasp a weapon.

But the last chance of Black Heart Bill, to play a game of treachery, was thwarted by the nerve and wonderful magnetic power of the Gold-Hunter over the brute creation, for with a stern command to the dog, the master animal dropped down and the desperado was foiled.

"You are tricky to the last, Black Heart Bill, I see," calmly said the sergeant.

"Curse you, I told you that I had no chance."

"For treachery no; but otherwise the same that I have."

"Come, stand back to back with me, and move at the word; but remember, if you attempt to quicken your pace, Mr. Langley will, drop you in your tracks."

"I will, so help me Heaven, and you know, Black Heart Bill, that I am a dead shot."

An oath was the only reply from if the desperado, and then the sergeant said:

"Now, Langley, give the word, and if I fall you will find my traps over in the canyon yonder, just at the base of the cliff, and you may fall heir to what I have, but write to the address given in papers of Andrew Seldon, and share the fortune you will learn the secret of."

"Let me also tell you that if I fall, kill that man without mercy, for he will not spare you."

"I thank you, and will act upon your advice, and quickly; but, Heaven protect you is my prayer," fervently said Lucas Langley.

Then came from the lips of Black Heart Bill a mocking laugh, which was checked by the voice of Lucas Langley, now strong and ringing:

"Are you ready?"

"Yes," said the sergeant firmly, while Black Heart Bill said nothing.

"Forward—one! two! three!" and in the same clear tones the second called out each number, until the last, *ten*, was spoken, when, quickly both men stooped, seized the revolvers at their feet, and wheeling, fired.

The two shots rung out as one, and the fugitive sergeant at once lowered his weapon, as though satisfied, while the arm of the desperado remained leveled, his hand still grasping his revolver.

But only a few seconds he stood thus, and then the revolver dropped from his hand, his arm fell to his side, his eyes glared at his enemy, until suddenly he fell heavily his full length upon the ground, a dead man.

The bullet had pierced his heart.

"Thank God!" came fervently from the lips of Lucas Langley, and stepping forward he grasped the hand of the sergeant, who stood looking down upon his fallen foe.

"Search his body, please, and see what he has that may be worth sending to his home, for I know where he lives."

Lucas Langley did so, finding a watch and chain, a ring, a buckskin bag of jewelry of various kinds, another of gold, a roll of bills, a note book and several letters.

These he handed to the sergeant who laid them aside, when he stepped up to the body, crossed the hands upon his breast, and then wrapped the form in a couple of blankets.

"I will dig a grave for him, as soon as I have brought my traps into camp," he said, and he walked away to find an easy descent into the canyon, where he had left his things.

In half an hour he had returned, and then he set to work to dig a grave with the pick and shovel of the miner.

This done he raised the body in his strong arms, bore it to the grave and laid it away as tenderly as though the man was one whom he had cared for in life as a friend.

The grave was filled in, and returning to camp the two men, so strangely met, had supper together, and the fugitive sergeant for the first time in many a long day ate a meal in peace, without a cloud hanging over his life, and one where there was much to tempt him, for Lucas Langley and his desperado friend had come most completely supplied to the wilderness.

After the meal was over, and the dog was fed by Lucas Langley, who wished to become friendly with him, the two talked together for an hour or more.

Then the two men wrapped themselves in their blankets and sunk to sleep, leaving the dog, Savage, to be their guard through the night, though they anticipated no danger in that region, for Lucas Langley said that during his stay there with Black Heart Bill not an Indian or a white man had been seen.

CHAPTER XIX.

PARDS.

THE morning dawned brightly, and Sergeant Wallace Weston arose refreshed and feeling like a new man.

Lucas Langley turned out of his blankets briskly, his mind at ease, and feeling bodily all right, he said.

The sergeant had given his name to his new-found friend as Andrew Seldon, the name of the dead miner he had found upon the desert, and whose belongings he had so strangely come in possession of.

He did not refer to his past, and was not questioned by Lucas Langley, who however had told him that he had had trouble in his old home which had driven him to seek a home upon the border.

What that trouble was he did not say, and the fugitive sergeant did not ask him.

Savage had guarded the camp well, and greeted the two men as they came out of the wicky-up with a wagging of the tail and a look that seemed to say:

"I know when I am well off, and accept the situation without a murmur."

Andrew Seldon, as we must now call the fugitive sergeant, patted the dog on the head, and when Lucas Langley again fed him, after breakfast, the two seemed to have become most friendly.

The breakfast was a substantial one, consisting of hoe-cake, venison steaks, bacon and coffee, and both men ate with a relish.

Then Andrew Seldon had a look at the three horses, and found them all fine animals.

The guns and stores were looked over, cleaned, and all in the camp put in good readiness for a move, for Lucas Langley had said:

"We will go to our gold-mine and camp, for there is a brook of water there, plenty of timber, and it is a safe retreat, with good grass for our horses."

So they packed their camp equipage upon the pack-horse, upon which Seldon placed the saddle and bridle he had brought with him so many long and weary miles, and then they set off on their trail for the camp which had so nearly cost the finder his life, and which in the end had been the cause of Black Heart Bill's death.

It was in a canyon breaking into the Grand Canyon, a fertile valley, small in size, but well sheltered, watered and wooded.

A spot was chosen for the camp where a superb view into the Grand Canyon could be had, and their axes soon cut down small trees enough to build a fair cabin for them, and to run a fence across the head of the canyon so that the horses could not stray out when allowed to be loose.

In a couple of days they were comfortably settled, game was plentiful, there was fish in the stream, and the health of Lucas Langley had so improved that he once more considered himself a well man.

Resting on Sunday, which day followed the finishing of their work, they set to work bright and early Monday morning to hunt gold.

Lucas Langley had explained that the gold he had found was in the brook, and that he did not doubt but that they could trace it along the water bed to a mine.

So they began in the stream, wading up it, and with a bag and their pick with them.

"I've got a piece of gold," cried Andrew Seldon, holding up a fair sized water-worn lump of precious metal.

"And I have another nugget," was the reply.

And so on, slowly up the stream they went for a mile or more, when they found that the brook started from several springs in a hill, and went no further, as Langley had hoped.

The first day ended with a fair find, of perhaps a thousand dollars in weight, and the pards retired early quite well satisfied.

But the next day the find was less, and so it went on from day to day until the bed of the stream was about cleaned out of yellow metal.

After two weeks, and after a hard day's work when the finds made only amounted to a few dollars, Andrew Seldon said:

"Pard, I believe we can do nothing more here?"

"That is my opinion unless we went to work in the hill."

"That is long and tedious work, so I suggest that we now go to my mine."

"Then you have one?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"Not very far from here, and I will start bright and early in the morning, leaving you to follow with the horses and camp outfit, for I will mark my trail."

"All right, pard, and I hope it will pan out better than my find."

"It will, and I will share with you in thirds, for there is another to have a third."

"That is liberal enough, and I am satisfied."

"There is a *cache* of provisions there, too, and so we will be fixed for a winter's work."

"I am with you, pard, so you lead."

"Late in the fall it will be well for one of us to go to Fort Wingate, the nearest place to us where we can purchase provisions, and get all we may need, and mail some letters home, for I wish to send the things taken from Black Heart Bill, home to his people."

"Not to tell them how he died?"

"No, except that he was killed in a duel."

"Don't send the jewelry, for it will give him away as a road-agent, for he got that by holding up stage coaches and robbing the passengers."

"I will say nothing to cause sorrow and shame to those who love him, for there are some that do."

"You have a big heart, Seldon, and I am glad of the day that I met you, for I owe life, everything to you."

"I am glad to have served you, Langley, and I hope that as pards we can enrich each other, for I am sure my find will pan out rich for all interested in it; but to-morrow will tell."

The next morning the Gold-Hunter started alone upon his trail of fortune, leaving Lucas Langley to follow with the camp outfit.

CHAPTER XX.

ON THE GOLD TRAIL.

THE same confidence that he would win, in his duel with Black Heart Bill, filled the breast of Andrew Seldon as regarded his finding the gold-mine of the man whose name he had taken.

He set out early from camp, having decided to go mounted, that his pard might the more readily follow his trail.

He had studied the map and directions he had found upon the body of the dead man found upon the desert, until he knew them by heart, and he had discovered that the canyon where they were encamped was marked in the drawing of the Grand Canyon.

The latter had been mapped out for several miles on either side, and by a skilled hand beyond all doubt, the drawing being perfect.

The estimated width and depth of Grand Canyon had been given, its topography, and one spot marked where it read:

"This is the only descent I can find into the canyon, and the trail is narrow, dangerous and long, it being a dozen miles to the river, eight thousand feet below."

"Once in the depths of the canyon and the beauty if the scene is in unison with the grandeur of the view from the mountain heights upon either side."

"There are springs of icy water, trees that must keep their verdure the year around, the river and streams are alive with the finest of fish, game is most abundant, there being mountain sheep, deer, antelope, elk, bear, turkeys, ducks, geese, quail, doves, rabbits and squirrels, while wild peach and plum trees are found, with berries, and the best of soil for raising vegetables."

"In the depths of this marvelous canyon

one could dwell undisturbed for centuries, it would seem, would never know want, or have a sorrow, and be at peace with God and man."

At one spot on the map of the canyon was a mark, beneath which was written:

"Here lies my gold mine, which I have staked out and laid claim to, marked the stakes with my name, which I have also painted upon the rocks, with my right and title as finder, and, as I firmly believe, the only man who ever penetrated to the depths of this canyon, this the greatest of Nature's handiwork."

The trail leading from the camp, where Andrew Seldon had found gold, to the one descending into the Grand Canyon, was plainly traced, and where the descent began was written:

"Warning—Let who goes down here, if I be not his guide, remember that it is the Trail of Death, for I lost one horse, that fell over the cliff; but two men, holding a rope on the outside against an animal, to force him hard against the rocks, could pass him down in safety."

"The spots most dangerous are marked with a warning."

"The trail down is twelve miles, perilous every step of the way, and the gold-mine three miles up the canyon, at the head of the stream marked in the map."

"Then directions are explicit enough; but can it be that I am to find the fortune there that that poor man says, he who found it, and then lay down upon the desert to starve?"

"I am a creature of Destiny now, Fate can have nothing more in store for me in the future than I have suffered in the past, and so I shall blindly follow where Destiny leads," and Andrew Seldon rode on at a canter along the rim of the mighty canyon.

At last he came to a spot marked in the map where he must begin the descent to the canyon.

There was a swale there, descending to the rim of the canyon, where there was a huge projecting rock, like the mighty prow of a steamer.

Down to this he rode, and by a close survey he found a rough and rocky way around the rock, beneath its towering height, down a shelf-like path along the face of a cliff three thousand feet in height.

None but a sailor, or a man of giant nerve dare make that descent.

But what man had done, man could do, argued the bold Gold-Hunter, and he said:

"I will do it."

"Wallace Weston is dead to the world, and the real Andrew Seldon died on the desert."

"I am now Andrew Seldon, and what he did, I can do, so down that path I go."

He dismounted; staked his horse out in the motte, wrote a few lines on a slip of paper, telling Lucas Langley when he came up to await his coming there, and then set out on foot down the trail.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE DEATH TRAIL.

HAVING staked his horse out up the swale, where he could find good grass, and the animal it was that had been Black Heart Bill's, Andrew Seldon went around the base of the rock and started down the perilous trail, which the papers and map in his possession designated the Death Trail.

It was a narrow shelf of rock, running along the face of the cliff, gradually descending and not more than four feet wide at its greatest width.

Here and there it went into chasms, then down a steep grade and again among a clump of cedars which had found a footing there.

On walked the Gold-Hunter, now pausing to gaze down a precipice, a sheer drop of three thousand feet in places.

Through a rocky tunnel he went, then around a jagged, narrow point where the words were painted on the rocks with the red clay found in the vicinity:

"The Death Turn—the worst spot on the trail."

The Gold-Hunter paused at the very point, leant against the rock and gazed down-

ward with a coolness that showed perfect control of his nerves.

He stood on a shelf just three feet in width at the point, and with folded arms gazed out over the limitless expanse spread out before him.

He looked up the Grand Canyon for a hundred miles, across to the river on Kaibab Mountain a dozen miles, and down the canyon as far as the eye could reach.

Above, a couple of thousand feet, towered the overhanging cliffs, and beneath his feet he could look down into the canyon six thousand feet.

A loose stone lay on the shelf, and picking it up he dropped it over the edge, watching its flight downward until distance hid it from view.

Down the valley, winding along, and looking like a huge silvery serpent, was the Colorado Grande, a river at that point two thousand feet in width, yet looking as though a deer in full flight could leap it.

There were red and blue cliffs of stone, pink and gray cliffs, forests of heavy timber, mountains and valleys, rugged peaks, plains and hills, all within the mighty chasm known as the Grand Canyon, and, spell-bound, the soldier stood gazing upon the scene before him for an hour and more.

At last he mused aloud:

"Oh! how small man is, how infinitely nothing in this vast scene of nature."

"Well, I must not stand longer here, though I could gaze for hours and never tire."

"I need go no further, for this warning says this is the worst spot on the trail; but, we can carry a horse around it where two of us can help him."

"It must be done," and shouldering his rifle Andrew Seldon returned slowly up the trail again.

The sun was near its setting when he reached the swale where he had left his horse.

A glance showed him that his pard had arrived, for the other horses were staked out, and a fire had been built in the edge of some cedars and Lucas Langley was preparing supper, having killed some game on his way over.

He greeted his companion's coming with a shout and said:

"I am glad to see you back again, for do you know I began to feel really nervous in being here in the midst of so sublime a spectacle as is before us, and I feared for your safety."

"Oh, no, I am all right; but, I can appreciate what your feelings are, pard, and yet to-morrow I will show you scenes that dwarf the one before us,"

"Now, let me ask you how your head stands a high place, or does it make you dizzy to look down from great heights?"

"Not in the least, for I was once a midshipman in the navy."

"I am glad of this, for we pass places to-morrow in our descent to the canyon, that would try the nerviest man."

"I can stand it, if it is no more than looking over a precipice," was the answer, and supper being ready, they sat down and ate it.

Turning into their blankets at an early hour, they were up and ready for the start at dawn, and the perilous descent was begun.

The three horses were placed in single file, but not tied together, and Andrew Seldon passed a stout lariat along the outer side, held to the horns of the saddles by a piece of string only.

Then he led the way around the rock, holding one end of the lariat, the horses faithfully following, while Lucas Langley, with the other end held firmly in his grasp, walked behind.

The rope was held taut by the two men, and the leader walked slowly, allowing the horses to pick their steps.

Now and then there was a stumble, then a moment of painful suspense, as a horse half hesitated, but the trappings had all been packed on the outer side of the saddles, allowing the animals to scrape as close as possible to the cliffs.

At last the most dangerous point was reached, the turn around the rugged rock, and here one horse was taken at a time, Langley coming forward and the two men

using the rope to hold the animal hard against the cliff.

One horse passed in safety, and the two men breathed more freely.

A second one was also guided by, though he missed going over by the merest accident.

The third had also a narrow escape, one hind foot slipping, but by a miracle he recovered himself.

Then the three horses were left in comparative safety beyond, and the two men stood regarding each other with looks of thankfulness.

Both were pale, and Lucas Langley slightly unnerved, for he had not yet fully recovered his strength.

"You have passed over here before, Pard Seldon, but it is new to me, and you are the only leader I would have followed around that cliff.

"It is worth a fortune indeed to take the risk."

Andrew Seldon made no comment upon the remark that he had passed there before, knowing that his comrade believed that he was going to a mine which he had discovered, and which he wished him to believe.

But in response he said:

"You will find the game more than worth the risk," I think.

"Now let us go on."

Down the Trail of Death they slowly went, for the danger was by no means over until the depths of the canyon were reached.

It was late in the afternoon when they arrived at the end of the cliff trail, and remembering his instructions in the papers and in the map, Andrew Seldon led the way up the canyon.

Above them wound, miles high they seemed, the cliffs of the canyon on both sides of the river.

A balmy breeze was blowing down the cliff-banked valley, the roar of the river dashing over a rapid was heard, birds sung in the trees, peach trees and plum trees were there, laden with fruit, and a more weirdly beautiful scene could not be imagined.

Quail ran ahead of them on the trail, a herd of deer bounded away at their approach, a mountain sheep stood far up on the rocks overhead, gazing down upon them in wonder, while a large mountain lion was seen gliding among the cedars, and Savage had to be called back sternly, for he sought a combat with him.

The shadows were deepening then, for the sun was behind Kaibab Mountain, and all nature seemed to invite them to rest in the new-found depths of the Grand Canyon.

After a ride of several miles, for they had mounted their horses after reaching the canyon, the eyes of the fugitive sergeant rested upon a name on the cliffs.

What he saw was:

ANDREW SELDON'S CLAIM.

"Found and staked Paradise Gold Mine

Oct. 1st. 18—"

"I have found it," he muttered to himself, while his face shone with triumph.

CHAPTER XXII.

PARADISE GOLD MINE.

WHEN Andrew Seldon arrived at the spot where the mine was situated, he did not wonder, as he gazed around them, that it had been named "Paradise Mine."

Lucas Langley had the same thought, yet he still was of the opinion that his companion was the owner and finder of the mine.

As he gazed upon the grand and inviting view, he did not notice that Andrew Seldon's eyes were not taking in the surroundings, but were roving about the immediate situation.

He was looking for the cabin of the miner which was marked on the map, the brook and pasture for the horses, so as not to show ignorance of the scene.

At last he spied the cabin, built of logs and nestling away in a protected nook among the cedars.

The brook, clear as crystal, bubbled along a few paces from the door, and just beyond was a rocky gateway, where there was a

canyon of a hundred acres in size, well watered, wooded, and with only the narrow entrance for egress and ingress.

There was a barrier at the entrance, built of logs, so that the horses could have ample freedom to roam, and the grass was long, juicy and of the very best variety for grazing.

Having taken in the situation of the camp, while his comrade was lost in admiration of the scenery, Andrew Seldon said:

"Come, pard, we'll have ample time to see this scenery, and night is not far off.

"Let us get to work, and I'll open up the cabin while you lead the horses up to the canyon yonder and turn them loose, only shut the barrier so they cannot stray."

Lucas Langley at once unsaddled the horses, leaving saddles and packs at the cabin, the door of which was chained and fastened with a padlock.

But Seldon took a key from his pocket, one he had found on the miner's body, and soon opened it.

The cabin was some twelve feet by ten, stoutly built, with a cave in the cliff, against which it was built, serving as a fireplace, the smoke coming out several hundred feet above among the rocks.

There was one bunk in it, a table of small saplings put together, and the tops hewn even, instead of boards, the door being similarly made.

There was a chair made also of slender poles, and in the fireplace a few cooking utensils.

This comprised all the furniture in the cabin, save a few blankets, a heavy double-barrel shot-gun, some fishing-tackle and a pair of rubber boots.

"How long ago did you discover this paradise, pard?" asked Lucas Langley, returning from having put the horses in the canyon.

"It was discovered just about a year ago."

"And you dared venture down here alone, into a canyon the very immensity of which is appalling?"

"Nothing venture, nothing gain, you know, pard," was the evasive response.

"That is true," and Lucas Langley went out and fetched in an armful of wood, which was already cut and piled up outside.

A bright fire was soon blazing in the natural chimney, the cabin looked cheerful, and the two men unpacked their traps and put them where they would be handy when needed.

While Lucas Langley prepared supper, Andrew Seldon went to work with a hatchet and nails found there and soon had another bunk built.

Savage sat upon his haunches enjoying the scene with evident satisfaction, while he watched with hungry eyes the broiling venison steaks upon the coals.

With evident relish the two comrades sat down to their first meal in their new home.

The shadows had deepened in the canyon, when they had finished supper and stepped outside, and though all was a glow on the cliff-tops, with the last rays of the setting sun, down on the river all was black, so dense were the shades in those depths.

They stood looking about them, watching the sunlight die, until night settled over all, and the stars shone above with a brightness the men had never seen before.

From the canyons came the howling of wolves and the fretful cry of the panther, while the owls, disturbed by human presence near their retreats, hooted most dismally.

Walking up into the canyon where the horses were, they found the animals standing huddled together against the barrier, in evident alarm of the wild beasts, and greeting them with welcome neighs showed how glad they were to have their masters near.

"We must stake them out near the cabin at night, pard," said Andrew Seldon.

"Yes, and Savage will be near to guard them."

So the horses were led down to a grassy plot near the cabin, and Savage was left on duty as guard.

Before going into the cabin to retire, Seldon fired several shots, and every cliff took up the echo until it sounded like a mighty battle in progress.

It was long before the last echo died away, and the two Gold-Hunters went to bed deeply impressed with their grand, weird, in truth their appalling surroundings.

CHAPTER XXIII.

FOUND.

LEAVING his comrade still sleeping, with the first streak of dawn Andrew Seldon crept out of the cabin, the door having been left open during the night.

There had been no disturbance while they slept, save an occasional loud-mouthed bark from Savage, the shots having put a quietus upon the howling of the wolves and the cries of the panthers.

The horses were just rising from the ground to eat their breakfast, and Savage greeted the coming of his new master with evident delight.

The cliff-tops, over eight thousand feet above the level of the valley, were brightening under the rays of the rising sun, and the shadows in the canyons were growing lighter in here.

Passing up the canyon Andrew Seldon paused under a lofty cliff, from whence flowed a dozen tiny springs, and stood gazing at the map he had in his hand.

Going close up to the rocks it took him but a few moments to discover that there was gold cropping out in many places, and there were indications that the base of the cliff had been worked with pick and shovel, and after an hour's search he muttered:

"It is found!"

"Yes, poor Andrew Seldon was right, he had a fortune in gold in this canyon."

"Even worked as we two can work it, we have riches here far beyond our needs."

"With a fortune in his grasp, he laid down and died of starvation in the desert, and sentenced to death, I live to reap the benefit."

"Such is life, so goes the world."

"In his little buckskin pouches he carried several thousands of dollars in gold, and I possess it now; but I will do my duty by those whom he mentions in his letters."

"I am Andrew Seldon now, for Wallace Weston is dead, and so even Lucas Langley, my faithful friend, and all others must believe me."

"I will hunt up the *cache* of provisions today, and then we will be fixed until late in the fall, when I will go to Wingate and get what we need for the winter, for we can work here during the cold weather, as snow will not reach us down here."

"When I go, I will mail two letters, one telling of Hugh Mayhew's death, for that I killed Manton Mayhew, will doubtless be already known, and the other letter will be to Andrew Seldon's little daughter, telling her of the fortune in store for her."

"Then it will remain for me to secure this fortune, dig this yellow gold from the mines, and in time become a rich man, so that I can enjoy life far from the scenes that I knew in boyhood, away from those that have hunted me down through life, for, as Andrew Seldon I can live in peace, and *Wallace Weston is dead*."

So musing the Gold-Hunter turned back toward the cabin, halted after a few paces, glanced at the map he carried, and then turned short off to the right.

Climbing some fifty feet up the steep side of a cliff, he came to a hole in the rocks, a small cave, and in this was found, wrapped closely in canvas, provisions of various kinds, ammunition, an ax, saw, hatchet, pick, spade and shovel, rope, some matches and blankets and cooking utensils all new, and placed there for future use, should his cabin be discovered by any chance and destroyed and robbed.

"This is indeed a good find," muttered the Gold-Hunter, as he descended the cliff and returned to the cabin, where he found Lucas Langley busy preparing breakfast.

"Well, pard, the things in the *cache* are all right, and just what we need."

"I put the horses in the canyon, and then took a look at the mine, and we will find good picking there, gold enough to make us rich men."

"Well, I am glad to hear it, though it seems that I could pass my days in this spot as a poor man, and never tire of it."

"See, I threw in my line twice and caught those fine fish, and we have a mess of peaches as well—this place is indeed a Paradise," and Lucas Langley waxed eloquent over their new home in the Grand Canyon of the Colorado.

After breakfast was over, with picks and shovels, they went to the mine beneath the cliff, and an hour's work convinced them that they would have a long year's work to get only the gold grains that there cropped out in abundance.

"Now, pard, we will take a ride around the canyon near our ranch to-day, and rest to-morrow, as it will be Sunday, and begin work on Monday."

"What do you say?"

"Just as you do, for the gold is found, our quarters are perfect, game and fish can be procured in abundance, and this is an ideal spot in which to dwell."

"Yes, Pard Seldon, I am happy here, and bless the day when you found Paradise Mine, while I am more than thankful that you allow me to share it with you, a debt I can never repay you, while I already owe you my life."

"Do not speak of it, Langley, or refer to the past, for we live in the present now, and hope for the future," was the response of Andrew Seldon, who was happy himself at being able to hide from the world, no longer feeling that he was a hunted man.

CHAPTER XXIV.

DOCTOR DICK.

Not very far from where the town of Flagstaff, Arizona, is now located, there was, at the time I write, a mining-camp known as Last Chance Claim.

A party of prospectors had hit upon gold in the canyon they were passing through, after they had given up all hope and were returning home to keep from starving.

The result was that each man staked out a claim, the camp was christened Last Chance Claim, and while one-half the party remained to dig for gold, the other half set off for the nearest post where they could get provisions and tools, and spread the glad tidings that they had struck it rich.

A wagon-train of miners at once set out for the promised land, and along with it went a storekeeper, blacksmith, and a landlord to open a hotel, with several saloon-keepers, all of which gave a solidity to the new camp that at once brought it into such prominence that the stage line put on a semi-monthly coach to and from Last Chance Claim, which at once began to more than pay expenses.

Like many of the mining "cities" of the Wild West, Last Chance was of mushroom growth, springing up within a few months into a population of several hundred souls, not one of which was a female, and numbering a hundred log cabins, one hotel, so called because the landlord said it was, and hung out his sign stating that it was the "Last Chance Hotel," as indeed it was the, last chance on earth to get anything to eat in that vicinity.

Then there was a blacksmith shop, stage office and stable, and half a dozen saloons, where whisky, taken "straight," and out of a tin cup, was the popular, yes and only beverage.

The cabins were scattered about, for several miles from the center of the camp, gold-digging was brisk, money plentiful and all was going well in Last Chance, when one day the stage coach came in with a new driver on the box.

The old driver was there, but he lay back upon the top of the coach with a bullet through his heart, and there were two passengers dead in the stage.

The six horses had dashed up to the halting place before the Last Chance Hotel, the reins held in a master hand, and at the rear of the coach, in lead, were two fine black horses, one equipped with a gold-mounted saddle and bridle, the other carrying a heavy pack.

The eyes of all were upon the strange driver as he drew rein, tossed the reins upon the backs of the wheelers, like one who knew what to do, and leaped nimbly to the ground.

"Who is he?" asked scores of men, for it was Sunday, and though a day of rest from working, it was a day of sport in the camps.

The stranger was dressed in gray corduroy pants, stuck in top-boots, the heels of which were ornamented with a pair of spurs, representing an eagle's head and wings, a dark-blue velvet sack coat, a white silk shirt, with wide collar and black silk scarf, in which shone a brilliant diamond, and a wide brimmed black sombrero, around which was a gold chain in place of a cord.

There was a handsome gold buckle upon his belt, and a suspicion that it contained revolvers, but they were not visible.

"Who is the boss here, gentlemen?" he said in a courteous way, as he faced the crowd.

"I am stage-agent and landlord of this hotel, sir," was the reply of an individual who stepped forward and confronted the stranger, and who was known as "Landlord Larry."

"Let me explain, sir, in a few words."

"My name is Doctor Dick, and I was on my way to Last Chance to hang up my shingle as a physician and surgeon, and gamble with all who wished to bet on a card, when I heard firing on the trail ahead and rode rapidly forward to see what it meant."

"This coach had passed me half an hour before, with a driver on the box and two passengers inside, and when I came up I discovered that it had been held up by road-agents.

"They had killed the driver and passengers, and were robbing the coach when I appeared and opened fire upon them."

"I was only able to get in a couple of shots—there lie the results under that canvas on the top of the coach."

"The others scattered, several in number, and I hitched my horses behind, put the passengers in the coach, tossed the road-agents' bodies on top and drove on to your camp."

"An examination of your way-bills will show whether they got anything of value."

"That is the story, gentlemen, as it happened."

The speaker had a face that commanded admiration in its perfection of feature.

It was darkly bronzed from exposure, clean shaven, and his expression winning, for his smile revealed a row of perfectly shaped milk-white teeth and his eyes were large, black and expressive, while his hair, wavy and glossy, hung down below his shoulders.

He had spoken in a way that carried conviction with his words that he was telling the truth, and all were startled when suddenly a voice in the crowd said in a loud, angry tone:

"Them as wants ter, kin believe that lie; but I believe you did the killin' and robbin' yerself, durned ef I don't say so, and my name are Boomerang Bob, at yer service, stranger, any time."

CHAPTER XXV.

TAMING A TIGER.

EVERY eye in the now large crowd of miners, that had hastened to the spot, upon the arrival of the coach, turned upon the man who had cast the lie into the teeth of the handsome stranger who had called himself Doctor Dick.

All knew him as Boomerang Bob, so named from the fact that no matter who got the best of him in a fight, or a game, he was wont in the end to turn out victor, to "come back at them with both feet," as he expressed it.

Boomerang Bob was a man of giant stature, with long red hair and beard, a darkly-bronzed face, and he dressed in red woolen shirt, black pants, slouch hat, top-boots and a belt in which there were two revolvers on each hip, and a Bowie-knife in a scabbard suspended around his neck to a necklace of bear-claws.

Boomerang Bob was an ugly customer to rouse, and from the day he had come into the mines he had ruled the miners with a rod of iron, for he celebrated his arrival by killing two men, which at once made him solid with the toughs, and dreaded by the better class of men, who were there to work hard for what they earned.

Since that day he had shot a negro, a Chinee, and an Indian, while, upon the principle of dog-eat-dog, he had killed the

desperado who had run the town up to his coming.

With such a record the crowd at once looked for Boomerang Bob to kill Doctor Dick, and as a doctor was just what was needed in Last Chance, they regretted that it would be the case.

But Doctor Dick simply cast an eye over among the crowd and picked out the man who insulted him.

His face did not change color, even, and he said in the calmest manner possible:

"Step out from the shelter of the crowd, and make your charge against me, my fine fellow."

Whether Boomerang Bob intended to step out or not, the crowd had no desire to shelter him at the risk of catching a bullet by accident, and they broke upon either side of the desperado with a unanimity of purpose that at once left the man standing alone.

There was something in the cool manner of the stranger that caused Boomerang to be caught off his guard, for he slowly put his hand upon his revolver and growled out:

"Well, I says it ag'in, and what is you goin' ter do about it, Velvet?"

Just how quick a revolver could be drawn had been a subject of much discussion and numerous bets in Last Chance; but all who saw the doctor draw would have wagered high that a weapon had never before been taken from its holster and leveled in so short a space of time.

It did not seem to be half a second that it took, and they heard the words, coolly uttered:

"Well, I am waiting for you to repeat your insulting words!"

Boomerang Bob was fairly caught at a disadvantage, for his hand rested upon his revolver, but the weapon had not been drawn from its holster.

"Yer has got ther dead drop on me," growled the desperado.

"I do not wish to kill you, or I would send a bullet through your brain; but you insulted me, and I shall not let you go without punishment.

"Hands up, and if one holds a revolver, the bullet goes through your heart!"

There was no mistaking the words or look now of the stranger, and Boomerang Bob had been trained in a school to obey when the odds were against him, and hoped to even up in the future.

So he quickly thrust his hands above his head, amid a deathlike silence.

"Turn the palms this way, sir!"

"What for?"

"Because I order it."

"Obey!"

The desperado obeyed, and then came the question:

"Have you any choice among your fingers?"

"What does yer mean?"

"I mean to clip one of them off at the second joint with my bullet—which shall it be?"

"Pards, does yer intend ter let me be murdered?" shouted the bully, but he did not lower his hands—he knew better.

"Your pards are not in this game."

"You challenged me to play it with you, and now, when I hold trumps you whine like a cowardly cur."

"Quick! name your finger, or my bullet takes your right hand off!"

"The little finger o' my left hand," yelled Boomerang Bob excitedly, and hardly had the words left his lips, when there came a flash and report, a shriek of pain, and the small finger of the bully's left hand was cut off clean at the second joint.

A wild yell went up from the crowd, in admiration of the splendid marksmanship of the stranger, and the sympathy, except among a few, was with the man who had shown that he could resent an insult, in a crowd where he had everything to fear, as he was unknown to all present.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE GOLD KING.

THE tiger was quickly tamed, for he still stood with upraised hands, down one of which a crimson stream was trickling.

Having administered his punishment, represented the insult offered him, the stranger

stepped up quickly to the desperado and extending his hand said:

"I have no hard feelings now, pard, so shake."

The hands were lowered, and one grasped that of the stranger, who continued:

"As I said, I am a surgeon and physician, and I will at once dress the remnant of that little finger, and in a couple of months you will not miss it."

"Come, my instruments are in my pack, and I'll get them."

He stepped to his pack-horse, quickly slipped out a leather case, containing surgical instruments, lint and medicines, and calling for a basin of water bathed the wounded hand skillfully, and binding it up took a silk handkerchief from his pocket and made a sling for the desperado to carry his hand in.

"What's yer bill?" growled Boomerang Bob when the work was done.

"We'll call it square, as it is my first call in Last Chance, and I wish you to come to me each day to have it dressed."

"Now, landlord, how can you fix me?"

"There's a cabin separate over there on the hill, sir, just built, and it has two rooms and is very comfortable, while you can take your grub at the hotel."

"That just suits me; but my horses?"

"They kin be stabled in the stage sheds."

"Good! will you go with me to my quarters?"

"Yes, as soon as you have told me more about this attack on the coach."

"I have told you all that I know."

"Do you recognize the passengers, or road-agents?" and the doctor turned to the dead bodies, which had been taken from the coach and placed in a row.

"We knows them two as a bad lot, and we suspected 'em of being crooked," and he pointed to the road-agents.

"The passengers is strangers, but Bud Benton, the driver, we all knew and liked, and a squarer, better man never held the ribbons over the backs of six horses."

"Pards, we must see that poor Bud Benton is avenged."

A yell of affirmation answered this remark of Landlord Larry, and Doctor Dick said:

"That is right, gentlemen, outlawry should be put down in this country."

"But, landlord, have you discovered if the road-agents got away with much booty?"

"Yes, they got a package of paper money the men sent gold-dust in to be exchanged for, as more handy of use, and there was ten thousand dollars lost, while these passengers were robbed of money and jewelry, I guess, and they look as though they might have been well fixed."

"But when was this hold-up, stranger?"

"Doctor Dick is my name, landlord, and I hope not to be a stranger any more to Last Chance; but, to answer your question let me say that I am unacquainted with your country here, and was simply following the stage trail, so think it was about five miles back, where there is a stream to cross."

"Yes, Red Run we calls it, for there have been deadly doings going on there before."

"Well, if you send back on the trail you may learn more, for the horses of the two dead road-agents are there, as I did not stop to bring them along."

"You was right; boys, get a gang together and go to Red Run and see if you can get on the trail of them outlaws."

"Now, doctor, we'll go over to your cabin."

Landlord Larry led the way to the cabin, a couple of hundred yards away and pleasantly situated.

It had just been built, and had in it a cot bed, a table and couple of chairs, as much furniture as could be allowed in Last Chance.

"This is all right, and I'll soon have an comfortable, with the things I carry in my pack," said Doctor Dick.

The horses were unsaddled and led away, and opening the large pack, the doctor unrolled some panther, bear and buffalo skins, Indian tanned, a number of red-skin souvenirs, boxing-gloves, foils and masks, a bundle of well-packed clothes, with hats, boots, and several gold-mounted revolvers and a repeating rifle.

He also had a handsome dressing-case, gold-mounted, with razors, mug, and all the necessary articles for toilet use.

It did not take him long to make his rooms look quite cozy, and Landlord Larry made the effort of his life to please him after he saw how he traveled in the Wild West, and told him he did not care what price he paid for board.

The result was that sheets were found for the cot, another table, an easy-chair, a basin and pitcher, and Doctor Dick expressed himself as more than satisfied.

As it was Sunday he concluded to "dress up" for dinner, and when he appeared at the hotel the miners were paralyzed to see him dressed in white corduroy pants, black velvet coat, the buttons of which were twenty-dollar gold-pieces, and a Mexican sombrero fringed with gold dollars, while the band was of a golden cord representing a snake and having diamond eyes.

About his waist was a belt in which were two gold-mounted revolvers, and his whole make-up was gorgeous in the extreme, striking with admiration the miners who beheld him, and causing one to at once call out:

"Three cheers for the Gold King!"

The cheers were given with a will, and Doctor Dick was thus christened "The Gold King of Last Chance."

CHAPTER XXVII.

BUFFALO BILL APPEARS.

DOCTOR DICK was not long in making himself a decided character of Last Chance Claim, even when to be otherwise was the exception.

The party that had gone out to the scene of the hold-up of the coach, had returned with the horses of the two dead road-agents, and told of evidence seen there of there having been a hot fight.

The coach in fact bore testimony to this, in the bullet-marks upon it, but no trace whatever of how the road-agents had come to the scene and departed could be found.

Bud Benton the driver was a popular man in Last Chance, and a brave one, and men spoke of avenging him.

The road-agents were given quick burial in the camp burying-ground, which was very well filled for so new a place as was Last Chance, especially when the place was very healthy, and "sudden death" was the cause of most of the taking off of the people.

For a man to die with his boots on in that camp was of more frequent occurrence than to fall a victim to disease.

Bud Benton and the two passengers were given what the miners called "a dandy send-off," for the camps turned out in force, a hundred voices sung "Nearer my God to Thee," as they marched to the grave over three hundred strong.

The "ceremony" at the grave consisted in singing and a few comments by the miners who wished to say something in farewell to Bud Benton and try and palliate his offences by telling the Lord that he was "O. K. and a squar' man all round, so don't be hard on him when he gits ter glory."

The doctor attended the funeral, and was quite as much an attraction as the corpses.

His "git up" was immense, and he looked like a man who was out of place in that rough camp.

But he had chosen to come to Last Chance to live, and he had certainly come in with all in his favor, having brought the coach in with two of the outlaws whom he had killed.

His summary punishment of Boomerang Bob had won the admiration of the miners, for they saw that he was a dead shot and had nerve as well.

The doctor's first night in camp proved without adventure, and when morning came the miners saw that he had hung out a sign, or rather nailed one upon his cabin:

"DOCTOR DICK,

: Physician Surgeon & Sport."

There were those who predicted that some day there would be trouble between Boomerang Bob and the doctor, for the former was no man to drop a quarrel once begun.

In fact, Boomerang's strong point was in coming back at one whom he disliked, or who had done him an injury.

He was very quiet about his having been punished by the doctor, but this rather meant trouble ahead.

Still he went to Doctor Dick's office the next day and got him to dress his wounded hand, as he had promised him he would do.

He was more polite than was his wont, but had little to say, and after thanking the doctor said he would call again in the morning.

"Do so, for I am a little afraid you are going to have an ugly hand of that; but I can tell in a day or two better."

"If it turns out bad, I'll amputate it for you with pleasure."

Boomerang Bob did not know just how to take this, whether it was sarcasm or kindness; but he gave the doctor the benefit of the doubt.

That day Doctor Dick had several professional calls, two from wounds, and half a dozen from sickness.

He went promptly, did just what was right, and left a good record behind him.

After supper he went to the largest gambling-den in the camps, accompanied by Landlord Larry, and after going the rounds of the tables sat down and played a game with several who prided themselves upon their "smartness" as gamblers.

All who watched the game decided that the doctor handled the cards like an expert, and saw him walk off with several hundred dollars he had won, and this gained for him another sobriquet of the "Doctor Sport."

The stage had gone out on time, under another driver, after his fatal adventure in coming in, and so the rumor had gone along the line of posts and camps, of the hold-up and death of the passengers, not to speak of the robbery by the outlaws of a large sum of money.

The report had been made to Fort Wingate, by Landlord Larry, and the result was that when the coach came in again there was a guard of two soldiers upon it.

But as no road-agents were seen on the run, they were taken off on the next trip, and the coach came in without a guard.

But soon after its arrival a horseman rode up to the Last Chance Hotel, whose coming and appearance created considerable commotion in the camps, for at once from lip to lip spread the news:

"Buffalo Bill, the chief of scouts, has come to Last Chance."

This information was followed by the question, which no one seemed able to answer:

"What is he here for?"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ON SPECIAL SERVICE.

THE days passed away at Fort Faraway, after the escape from execution of Sergeant Wallace Weston, yet the fugitive soldier, who had met so sad a fate upon the desert, as was believed, was still the topic of conversation.

There was a mystery hanging about the man which none could fathom, and, up to the time he had taken the life of a brother sergeant, Manton Mayhew, there never had been one word, or report against him.

The wives of the officers who saw him were all agreed that the sergeant was a gentleman born, and they wove about his life some hidden romance that must remain a mystery.

Of course his death was officially reported in a few words, that he had daringly escaped execution, had fled into the desert without water or food, and several days after Buffalo Bill had guided Lieutenant Tompkins and a squad of cavalry to where the dead body of the sergeant had been found, half devoured by wolves, his horse lying by his side and also furnishing a feast for coyotes.

The body had been buried where found, and a huge rock rolled over the grave.

If there was a single person who doubted that Sergeant Weston had not met his fate, he, or she kept it a secret, and he was remembered only as dead.

That he had suffered far more, in starving upon the desert, than he would through an execution, all felt certain, and he had their sympathy, for somehow they felt that he had kept back testimony at the trial which, if it did not clear him, would at least palliate his crime.

He was missed from the fort sadly, for, a fine musician, he had often given enjoyment

by singing to his comrades in a tenor that many said would have been his fortune had he gone upon the operatic stage.

Why a man that was educated, who was known to speak several languages fluently, who could sketch and paint and was really very accomplished should have enlisted in the army as a private, when there were virtually other fields open to him in which to make a handsome living, none could understand, and therein lay the romance of his life.

He had quickly risen to a sergeant's position, and it was believed would be eventually recommended for an officer's rank; but suddenly came his downfall, his killing of a brother sergeant, his trial, sentence, escape and supposed death.

Thus matters stood at Faraway when one day Major Randall sent for Buffalo Bill, who had just brought dispatches in from Fort Wingate.

"Cody, sit down for I wish to have a talk with you," said the major and the scout obeyed.

"You made remarkably good time through with these dispatches.

"Was there need for it?"

"No more, sir, than the rumors I heard at Wingate, that the Indians were in an ugly mood, and that road-agents were taking to the Overland Trail again, and had held up a coach on the new run to Last Chance, Major Randall."

"That is just it, Cody, the road-agents have been up to more deviltry, my dispatches say, and I am ordered to look after the outlaws with a force from this end of the line."

"A force will do little good, sir, for at sight of the soldiers the road-agents play the prairie-dog act, that is hunt their holes, and you look in vain for them."

"That is my idea; but still I must move in the matter, and at once, and hence I sent for you."

"Anything I can do, sir, command me."

"I know that you are willing enough, but I dislike to send you upon a trip that is so full of deadly peril."

"Don't mind that, sir, for it is our duty to carry life in our hands out here."

"Well, it seems the semi-monthly coach to Last Chance, that new mining-camp which is growing so, and where the miners are striking it rich, I learn, was held up not many miles from the end of its run by road-agents.

"The driver, Bud Benton, was killed, as also two of the passengers, and they were all robbed.

"The driver reported to the colonel, upon the run back, that the coach was brought in by some daring fellow, who killed two of the road-agents and drove the others off."

"He brought in on the top of the coach, the two outlaws he had killed, and the bodies of the others, and thus established a name for himself in Last Chance as a hero."

"He was a plucky fellow, sir, to attack odds as he did."

"He was indeed; but Cody, my wish is to get at the haunts of these outlaws, to know if any of them are of the desperado element from Last Chance, and find out just what can be done in the matter, so I desire you to take what scouts you need from your band and go on this special mission for me."

"I will go at once, major, and alone, for I can do better detective work without my men, and it amounts to that."

"I leave that with you, Cody."

The scout rose and said:

"I will be ready to start, sir, within two hours, and report for further instructions."

An hour after he rode away on his mission.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE SCOUT-DETECTIVE.

LANDLORD LARRY knew Buffalo Bill, for he had met him several times before, and he was proud to have the famous scout as a guest at his hotel.

He gave him the best room he had, ordered a special supper for him, and said:

"I wish to make you acquainted with the dandy man of our camp, Mr. Cody."

"Who is he, Larry?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"Well, that I can't tell you, any more than that his name is Doctor Dick, or that's what he calls himself."

"Well, and who is Doctor Dick?"

"A dandy from Wayback, for he's the man who stampeded the road-agents when they killed poor Bud Benton, and his passengers, and got the boodle from 'em."

"Yes, I heard the coach had been held up on the trail; but, could you find out nothing about the outlaws?"

"Not a photograph of them, though the boys spent a couple of days on the track."

"If you had been here you might have trailed 'em; but, it's a shame to have a coach held up like that was, and it'll give a black eye to the prosperity of Last Chance."

"Hardly, Larry, so long as the gold in the canyon holds out, for people will take chances every day with death to get rich, and, from all accounts your mines here are paying well."

"The very best; but, will you go over and call on the Doc?"

"Oh, yes, if you wish it."

"I does."

"See here, Larry, can you keep your tongue between your teeth?"

"You bet I kin."

"It is to your interest to do so, and it will be worse for you to chatter."

"I hain't no old maid, Bill."

"Some men are worse gossips than a dozen old maids and a parrot; but, I believe you will keep a secret."

"Try me, Bill."

"Well, I am here on a special mission."

"Gold-hunting?"

"No, hunting Gold-Hunters, see?"

"Is some of the miners playing it too strong?"

"I accuse no one; but, there is some one hunting for gold in a careless way, trying to get rich in one haul by holding up a coach, and using a bullet instead of a pick."

"I'm catching on."

"I am here to find out just where these outlaws are, and you can help me."

"I'll do it."

"Now, that I may not be looked upon as a scout-detective, a spy, let me tell you that I wish to go in partnership with you in a mine, that is, apparently as a partner, though really not one, for I am poor and could not buy even a small interest in the mine that is making you rich, Larry."

"It's pannin' out big, Bill."

"So I have heard, and you are not losing money with what it makes you happy to call a hotel," and Buffalo Bill smiled as he glanced at the log shanty known as the Last Chance Hotel.

"It hain't no New York palace, Bill, but, it goes out here, and it's as big a gold mine in its way as that hole in the hill down the canyon is in its way."

"I do not doubt it, Larry, and if you don't give your guests feather-beds and finger-bowls, you feed them well, I know."

"But now to my plan to stay here a few days."

"Go ahead."

"Take me down to see your mine first, and pretend to the miners that I, with several others whom I represent, go in with you in shares, while I am looking about to find a claim or two to buy for officers at the fort, at the same time prospecting for a little lead on my own account."

"I understand."

"This will give me a chance to look about, Larry, and come here now and then without exciting suspicion, while in reality I am on the hunt for outlaws, a detective to ferret out what their game is and what plays they intend to make."

"I'm with you, Bill, so now let us go down and look over the mine—unless you wish to meet the doctor first?"

"No, I will meet him on my return from the mine; but you have not told me who he is?"

"Doctor Dick."

"His other name?"

"Dunno."

"What does he do?"

"Shoots, practices medicine, gambles and chips in as partner in mines now and then."

"Is he well off?"

"He does a big business in medicine, wins money when he plays cards, has not made any mistake in mine investments, and dresses 'way up, wearing velvet, with gold buttons."

"In fact his weapons are gold-mounted and he runs so to the yellow metal we call

him here the Gold King, and also the Doctor Sport.

"I wants you to meet him, Bill."

"And I wish to meet him, and will," rejoined the scout.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE LANDLORD OF LAST CHANCE HOTEL.

THE two claims of Landlord Larry were good ones, and he was proud of them.

He was a man who had frittered away his years until after he turned forty, and then came to a realizing sense of the fact that in ten years more he would be an old man.

Then he decided to make money and save it, for though he had often done the former he had never been guilty of the latter.

With what he had he had started the Last Chance Hotel, bringing his furniture by wagon-train from Santa Fe.

He had a saloon and gambling den in connection with his hotel, and from the day they were open they began to pay.

Then his mines, for he had staked out claims, showed a paying quantity in gold, far above the expense of hiring diggers, and Larry saw the prospect of becoming a millionaire some day.

The moment this idea took possession of him, he lived to make money alone.

He was not a bad man, but generous by nature, a trifle rough in his manners, peaceable, yet a hard man when driven too far, and had come West from a sheer love of adventure and roving, after having been given the mitten by an old sweetheart.

When the coach-line was started, Larry became the Last Chance agent for it, and he was appointed postmaster and Express agent as well, all of which positions brought some money to his coffers.

His next move was to start a store, and as agent for the coaches and Express, he bought his goods at half rates, and got no cheap merchandise.

In this way his groceries came cheaper to him in the running of his hotel.

As the coach-agent, Larry also kept horses for sale and to hire, and that necessitated his establishing a blacksmith-shop.

The reader will naturally see, with these things in his favor, that Landlord Larry was what the miners called the "boss of the camps."

He was the "big man" of Last Chance, and his word, or decision, settled many a difficulty, and he was brave enough to have the courage of his convictions and stand by them, if need be, with a revolver.

He sold rum, but never drank a drop of it, never used tobacco in any form, owned mines, but never stuck a pick in dirt, was proprietor of a gambling-house, yet never played cards.

He held stakes for all the bets made, raced horses of his own, but never bet on them, simply charging commission for running them, and if he went a hundred yards from his quarters, he rode horseback.

His rooms were over the hotel, the only second story about it, and he went up and came down by a ladder in his office, which was all boarded in, as though to stand a siege.

No one but Larry and his clerk, a young giant, who was also the "bouncer" of the hotel, ever entered the sacred precincts of that office, but it was hinted that Larry had a perfect armory there of rifles and revolvers resting upon brackets, ready for instant use, while a few asserted that the landlord had a keg of powder, to which a train led ready to blow the building to pieces if he could not control a mob in any other way.

That Larry had been educated was certain, and he had a library in his rooms that was composed of books which only a cultivated mind would care for.

Still he spoke in the dialect of the border, dressed like a miner, and put on no airs.

Such was the landlord of the Last Chance, and who, when he received a letter, which now and then was the case, found it addressed to "Lawrence Larrimore," so that in the cognomen of Larry he still clung to a part of his real name.

When it was decided that Buffalo Bill should just visit the mines, Landlord Larry ordered two horses brought around, and mounting he and the scout rode away down the canyon.

There were few in the mining-camps of Last Chance who had seen Buffalo Bill, but all had heard of him, and his record was a national one, and every eye, as he passed along, seemingly unconscious that every gaze was upon him, took him in from head to foot, and comments were freely made upon his superb seat in the saddle, his handsome face, and look of daring which his many exploits fully backed up.

"They are enter yer, Bill, and you bet they knows yer, for who don't on this border," said Landlord Larry, pleased with the admiration his friend commanded from all.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE DESERTER.

DOWN the valley rode Landlord Larry with Buffalo Bill the chief of scouts in the military department, in which the several forts were located that were on that part of the frontier.

The miners greeted them pleasantly, all anxious to see a man about whom they had heard so much as they had of Buffalo Bill.

Only a few had a seen him before, but his record in the mines was the common talk around the camp-fires, and about the frontier assembling places.

The scout spoke pleasantly, when addressed by any one, and once or twice, when cheered by a small crowd, raised his hat in response.

At last the first one of Landlord Larry's mines was reached and the two dismounted to have a look at it.

There were some eight or ten men working with picks and shovels in the side of the cliff, picking up now and then the small yellow grains of the precious metal as they dug them out, but all eyes fell upon the landlord and the scout as they arrived and dismounted.

"These are my miners," said Larry with an air of pride, and Buffalo Bill answered:

"Glad to see you, boys."

But hardly had he uttered the words when his eyes became fixed upon one of the party.

It was a man who had shrunk back at sight of him, and half-turned his face away.

Following the gaze of the scout all glanced toward the man, and each eye noted that he had turned to the hue of death.

"Landlord Larry, there is one man that I recognize, and I am sorry to see that he is in your employ," said Buffalo Bill.

"You mean Reddy, for he has turned white at seeing you, Bill."

"Yes, I mean the man there leaning on his pick, Roger Redfield a deserter from the army, yes, more than that."

"It's a lie! I never was in the army," yelled the man.

"There is no need of your denying it, Redfield, for a man masked as you are with red hair and beard, and black eyes cannot hide his identity."

"You are my man."

"I say I am not."

"I'll prove it."

"How?"

"If I am wrong I'll give you a chance to resent it by allowing you to strike me a blow, square in the face, as hard as you can."

"Well?"

"If I am right, then you go back with me to the fort."

"How are you going to prove it, Bill?" asked Larry, as he saw that there was an ugly look in the accused miner's eyes.

"If that man is Roger Redfield, he has on his breast a blue anchor in India ink and the initials R. R."

"Come, Redfield, show up."

"My name is not Redfield, and I am not the man he believes me."

"Have you not the mark I speak of on your breast, just here?" and the scout designated the exact spot.

"No, I have not."

"Dare you show your breast?"

"Yes."

"Do so, and I'll give you satisfaction for the insult."

The man hesitated, unbuttoned his woolen shirt and then said:

"I've got a bad scar on my breast, I admit, where I was burnt when a child by falling on a burning log; but I have no brand such as you say, Buffalo Bill."

"How did you know that I was Buffalo Bill, for Landlord Larry did not mention my name?"

The man's face flushed and he replied:

"I just thought so, from what I heard of you."

"Now show your breast, Redfield."

"Yes, Reddy, show up," said Larry.

The man pulled open his shirt and revealed a red scar, as from a burn, and fully three inches square.

"See!"

"Yes, I see that you felt that that brand would some day betray you, and so you burned it off, painful as was the operation."

"Say, pard, that hain't squar' ter Reddy," said a miner.

"Yes, he's showed up and ther brand hain't thar as you said," another remarked.

"Men, I am not after you, so don't drop in until your time comes."

"I came here on business with Landlord Larry, not on the hunt for this man."

"But I happen to know his record, for he was in the navy and killed a brother sailor and escaped."

"He enlisted in the army, and one afternoon was recognized by a naval officer who visited the fort where he was stationed, and that night, before the charge was made against him, he deserted, carrying with him a large sum of money he robbed his comrades of."

"I am not after blood-money, for there is a reward for his arrest, offered by the soldiers of his regiment, and I will give it to the Soldiers' Home fund; but I have orders to arrest that man wherever I find him, and I intend to do it now that I have found him."

CHAPTER XXXII.

AT BAY.

THE words of Buffalo Bill caused the accused man and his comrades to move about uneasily and assume an anxious look, seeing which Landlord Larry said:

"But, Bill, you have not proved that this is the man."

"Haven't I?"

"We'll see if I have not, Larry."

"In the first place, Redfield was a man of the size of that one, and had red hair and beard, with intensely black eyes."

"Yes."

"Then he had the brand on his breast that I speak of."

"But this man has not."

"Has he not a burn there where the brand was burnt off?"

"Well it might be as he says."

"Then why did he leave down on the lower edge the bottom part of the two letters, R. R.—see, there is over a quarter of an inch of the lower part of the letters, which he failed to burn off, and had not the courage to repeat the dose of burning, when he saw his mistake."

"It isn't so," shouted the accused.

"Let us see, Reddy," and Landlord Larry stepped forward and drew the shirt aside.

"By Jove you are right, Bill, and have keen eyes to detect that; but there is the blue India ink sure enough, and the signs of two letters—R's."

"I say no," yelled the accused man again, and his face grew blacker and blacker with rage.

"Well, Redfield, for the sake of argument we will drop the brand on your breast, and I'll prove it in another way."

"How can you?"

"I saw you in swimming at the fort once, and I noticed that the small toe of your left foot was missing."

"It hain't."

"If I am wrong I'll give you a shot at me ten paces off, and if I am right, you go back to the fort with me when I go."

"That's squar', Reddy," said a miner.

"I'll not show up," growled the man accused.

"Won't you! Off with that left boot, or I'll send a bullet through your brain."

The action of the scout was so unexpected, his movement so quick in leveling his revolver, which was drawn from its holster like a flash, that Reddy was taken completely by surprise.

He turned livid once more, while, with a quick glance at the restless miners, Buffalo Bill said:

"See here, men, I will stand no interference in the discharge of my duty, so be careful, for I have my eyes on you, too."

This quieted an evident show of resistance, and the scout repeated:

"Off with your left boot, Redfield, or I'll carry out my threat."

"Sit down, Reddy," and the landlord stepped forward to take off the boot.

But the miner stepped back and said:

"See here, pard, that accursed scout has got me down fine, for I has got a toe missing; but it's only a queer accident, and I hain't ther man he says, so don't let him take me, and have me strung up when I hain't guilty."

"Stand by me, pard!"

The acknowledgment of having a toe missing, as Buffalo Bill had said, the burn on his breast, with the parts of the letters showing below, while he had red hair and beard, with jet-black eyes, was convincing proof to Landlord Larry that the scout had made no mistake, that he knew his man.

The other miners, too, were of the same opinion, but, appealed to by their comrade for aid, they decided to help him out of a bad situation.

As if a mental telegraphy had passed between them, the eight men who were there as comrades of Reddy, at once drew their revolvers and covered Buffalo Bill, while one cried:

"Run for it, Reddy, and git out o' ther way!"

But Buffalo Bill did not change color, did not move the hand that covered the accused, and said in the coolest manner possible:

"If you stir from that spot I pull trigger, and if I am riddled with the bullets of your comrades, I will kill you."

It was an instant of terrible suspense to all, and Landlord Larry broke the silence, as the men stood there with leveled revolvers, Buffalo Bill covering Reddy, and himself covered by the revolvers of the seven other miners.

"Men, I won't have this row, and you know I am not one to fool with."

"Buffalo Bill is in the discharge of his duty, Reddy is guilty, the man he says he is, and you are interfering with a Government officer, remember, so put up yer weapons and don't make fools of yourselves."

The words of Landlord Larry made an impression, but it was at once destroyed by an appeal from Reddy, who called out:

"Stand by me, pard, and don't let Buffalo Bill take me to the fort to be hung!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

DOCTOR DICK CHIPS IN.

THE situation was a most threatening one. The miners were restrained from acting from two reasons.

First, the man they covered with their revolvers was Buffalo Bill, a Government scout, a man with a record which would quickly bring the vengeance of his many friends and the army down upon Last Chance, if he was killed there.

They could kill him, yes, for seven revolvers covered him, and the men were good shots that held them, while he was not ten feet from them.

The second consideration was that they all liked their employer, Landlord Larry.

He was Buffalo Bill's friend, and he had sided with him.

Again, not one of them doubted the truth of the scout's charge against the man they knew as Reddy, and whom he had called Roger Redfield.

These were the ends of the two letters, the burn on the breast to prove his charge a true one, and Reddy had confessed to there being the small toe on his left foot missing, which, with the fact that he was so strangely marked with brightened hair and beard, and black eyes, could not help but prove that there was no mistake.

They had also heard him say, too, that he had been a sailor.

He was not an exactly popular man, yet was liked, for he sung a good song, played the guitar, and also told a good story.

Still he was their comrade and he had pleaded with them to save him.

This they must do, if they could manage it, though each one hesitated at pulling trigger on Buffalo Bill.

"Men, remember, you are turning your muzzles, upon a Government officer, though I do not wish to protect myself under that guise."

"You are protecting a murderer, a criminal, a man who deserted from the navy, then from the army, and was a thief as well."

"He even stole a handsome inlaid guitar given him by the colonel's daughter to repair for he plays that instrument well, and sings."

"He is my man, and I will take him if I have to shed blood to do so."

The mention of the guitar was further proof that Buffalo Bill knew his man.

Not one doubted it now, but they had taken a stand they must maintain, and one of them, acting as leader, asked:

"How is yer goin' ter take him, Buffalo Bill?"

"I will find a way."

"But we has you covered, dead sure, and I says to Reddy ter git."

"And I say that if he moves I'll kill him."

"Then we kills you dead sartain."

"It may be, but I expect to die some day in the discharge of my duty, so it may be that my time has come," was the cool reply of the scout.

This response caused the miners some uneasiness, which was increased when Landlord Larry said:

"Men, Buffalo Bill came here on business with me, for he has bought a share in my mine, and is looking for shares in others for some officers."

"He is my guest, and coming here to prospect, for he knows gold when he sees it, he recognizes a man he has orders to take wherever he finds him."

"You know, as well as I do, that Reddy is the man Buffalo Bill says he is, and I want you to understand that if the scout kills him, and you fire as you threaten upon a Government officer, I know the men who do the work, and they'll be the first in Last Chance before the sun sets."

"Now, you've heard my opinion, so you better take my advice, as I know what is best."

"Don't let him take me, pard, and if he draws trigger on me, avenge me," pleaded Reddy, as he saw that the words of Landlord Larry had their effect upon his companions.

A glance the leader gave at the others, and then at the piteous, pleading face of the accused, and then said:

"We'll stand by you, pard, and don't you forget it."

"And don't you forget that I will stand by Buffalo Bill," said a stern voice, and Doctor Dick stepped around the corner of a rock and advanced, a revolver in each hand.

"Doctor Dick! the right man in the right place," cried Landlord Larry, while Buffalo Bill had not changed a muscle, nor moved his hand from a level or taken his eye off of the man his revolver covered.

"Pardon me, gentlemen, for breaking in on your little seance, but I was riding down the valley, saw that trouble was going on, so dismounted and drew near enough to overhear that it was Buffalo Bill whom you were threatening, and that because he was doing his duty."

"Gentlemen, drop your weapons, or I open fire, and let me give you a hint that I never miss, and I only act to prevent you making fools of yourselves."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE SCOUT WINS.

THE arrival of Doctor Dick put a new phase upon the situation.

He was immensely popular in Last Chance, and a specimen of his shooting had been seen.

When he could have killed Boomerang Bob, he had simply clipped a finger off, and then had doctored him until he got well.

He was a gambler, yet never played with a poor miner, and never took all a rich one had in putting up his money on a game.

He gave his services free to one who had

no money, and obeyed a call as quickly for a pauper as one with money.

He was generous, courteous to all, but all knew that he was a dangerous man and he commanded both their regard and admiration.

Now that he faced the seven miners with a revolver in each hand, standing in an oblique direction from them while they covered Buffalo Bill with their weapons, they saw that they were in as much danger as the scout, and the man they sought to befriend.

Each one seemed to feel that Doctor Dick's revolver covered him individually, and they also discovered that Landlord Larry had his weapons drawn.

With three such men as Buffalo Bill, Doctor Dick and Landlord Larry to face, they at once began to weaken.

The leader of the miners felt that he could see the bullet in the doctor's pistol, and he lost no time in calling out:

"Buffalo Bill, you wins ther game, for when ther doctor chips in I weakens for one."

"Me too," said several others in chorus, while one remarked:

"We'd like ter stand by yer, Reddy, but its no use, for ther game is ag'in' us, and we don't hold narry a trump."

"I am glad that you think that way, pard, for I do not like to turn my gun upon my friends; but I won't see Buffalo Bill shot down by any man, for he has a clean record and though I never met him before, I admire him for his nerve."

The doctor, from the moment of his arrival, had spoken in the coolest manner possible.

He was not in the slightest degree excited, had looked like one not interested.

But now Buffalo Bill said:

"I thank you, sir, for preventing bloodshed, and I can only explain to you that I recognized this man as a murderer, twice a deserter from the service and a thief."

"I proved his identity, but he appealed for aid to his comrades, and I hold no ill-will against them for responding, for they showed a manly nature in doing so."

"But it is better that this criminal should suffer punishment, than that half a dozen brave fellows be shot down in protecting him."

"Again I thank you, sir."

"You are more than welcome to the little service I rendered, Buffalo Bill, for so I heard you called, and I was told you had arrived at the Last Chance arid ridden down the valley with Landlord Larry."

"Yes, I am so called, but my name is William Cody, and yours—"

"Is Doctor Dick, surgeon, physician and gambler," and the two men grasped hands, while, looking him fixedly in the face, Buffalo Bill said:

"You said that you had not met me before."

"I never have, sir."

"Can I be mistaken then, for I certainly have met you."

"When and where?"

"Your face comes back to me strangely, yes, your form is the same of some one I have met under circumstances that have made an impression upon me—ah! I recall it now, it is Sergeant Manton Mayhew whom you so closely resemble."

The face of Doctor Dick flushed, then paled, and he replied:

"Of Sergeant Manton Mayhew I will talk with you later, Mr. Cody."

"The landlord will show you my quarters, so come and see me," and Doctor Dick bowed politely to the scout, turned, hesitated, and said:

"See here, men, if this quarrel with Buffalo Bill is renewed you will have me to deal with, and I'll have the Vigilantes to back me."

"I hope you understand."

"We does, Doc, and there'll be no more trouble," called out the leader of the miners, and turning to Reddy, who sat upon a rock, his face buried in his hands, he continued:

"We tried to help you out, Pard Reddy, but the cards was ag'in' yer, and the game didn't run our way to the end."

"No hard feelin's I hopes ag'in' us, Buff'ler Bill?"

"None in the least, my friends," and Buffalo Bill extended his hand and the leader grasped it.

Then the others stepped forward and shook hands with him, and turning to Reddy the scout said:

"I am sorry for you, Redfield, but you are my prisoner, and must go back with me to the fort when I leave."

"Have you a place where he will be safe, Larry?"

"Yes, ther pen, up at my hotel, is where we puts 'em when we wants ter keep 'em safe."

"Come, Redfield," and the scout led the man away, his comrades gazing in silence after him.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A MADDED MOB.

THE return of the landlord and the scout, mounted upon their horses, with Roger Redfield, or Reddy, walking ahead of them, his hands bound behind his back, created a sensation as they went up the valley.

The news soon spread that Reddy had been recognized as a murderer and deserter, and the scout had captured him.

As though he expected there might be an outbreak, Doctor Dick returned up the valley not far behind the scout and his prisoner, and was near at hand when Reddy was put in what they called the "Pen."

It was a rear room in the hotel, built of the stoutest logs and with two windows that were a couple of feet long and only four or five in width, so that no one could get through them.

The ceiling was of the some stout logs, and the door was six inches thick, and studded on the outside with nails driven into it until they formed an iron sheeting.

The door opened out, and was held fast by two iron bars that were locked over staples by padlocks.

A cot and bench was all the furniture in the Pen, which also was called poetically "Deaths' Threshold," from the fact that when a man got in there he was generally led out to die.

Reddy seemed utterly cast down by his capture, and threw himself down upon the cot with an air of utter despair.

The door was closed and locked, and, as it was so secure, there was no need of a guard, and in fact no miner could be found to have stood watch over an unfortunate fellow.

Buffalo Bill was not long in seeing that his capture of Reddy had taken away from his popularity, yet he felt he had only done his duty, for his orders were most particular as regarded the bringing back to the fort of the man if he ever found him.

He rode away with Landlord Larry once more, to visit the mines that it might be seen the capture of Reddy was through an accidental meeting.

He seemed much pleased with what he saw, and invested in two claims offered him by miners too lazy to work them, purchasing one in the name of Major Randall, and the other for Lieutenant Tompkins and Peyton at Fort Faraway.

"They will pay liberally, I think," he said to Landlord Larry, and miners were engaged to work them.

It was sunset when they returned to the hotel, and a glance showed that there was a larger crowd than usual and the miners were somewhat excited.

They were discussing the coming of Buffalo Bill, and his arrest of Reddy, and they wished to know the exact facts of the case.

The scout went to his room, while Landlord Larry circulated about giving the truth of the story about Reddy, and at once a better feeling prevailed when Larry said:

"Now, pards, you don't want a thief in your camp if you knows him to be one, and such Reddy is, for Buffalo Bill, Jake Swartz, Pete Hendrick and me went to his cabin, and you know he always lives alone and never left his door unlocked."

"Well, there we found the very guitar he stole from the colonel's daughter, and it's got her name on it in pearl letters."

"Nor is that all, for we found there a pair of revolvers he stole from an officer at the fort, a cigar-case with the name of another officer on it, and half a dozen watches and other jewelry Buffalo Bill says he swiped from the soldiers, for he recognized some of 'em."

"Then too he had plenty o' greenbacks, clean, crisp bills just such as the Government pays the soldiers in, while two packages were not broke into and had the paymaster's name and stamp on 'em."

"Yer see he's been in hiding over two years, and hain't had a chance to spend his booty, which in all he has left, runs up ter three thousand dollars."

"No, pard, yer don't want no such man in Camp Last Chance."

A yell of approval greeted these words, while one voice shouted:

"No, we doesn't want him—hang him!"

The cry was at once taken up, and loud noises, oaths, cries and threats followed, until one man called out:

"I has a rope—so string him up!"

"Yes, to the Pen and git him!"

Landlord Larry was in despair.

He had talked too convincingly, and now must quell the storm he had raised.

But Buffalo Bill had heard the threatening cries, and came rapidly upon the scene, while behind him Doctor Dick was discovered walking rapidly to the spot.

The scout made no comment, simply stepped quickly to the side of Landlord Larry, who had placed his back against the door of the Pen, while the prisoner within stood peering through the long window with staring eyes and white face, for well he knew what it meant for a border crowd to decide to hang a man they deemed guilty of a crime for which a rope-end was the penalty.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

BUFFALO BILL GIVES A LESSON IN PISTOL PRACTICE.

THE moment that Doctor Dick appeared upon the scene, he placed himself by the side of Buffalo Bill and Landlord Larry.

There they stood, these splendid specimens of manhood, at bay to protect a criminal.

The crowd had changed into an ugly mood.

From wishing to protect the prisoner, when they knew all the facts, they now determined to hang him.

It amazed them to see that the scout intended to protect him, and the self-appointed leader of the mob shouted:

"You wants ter hang him, Buffalo Bill, and we intends ter do it."

"You are mistaken, my friend, I do not wish to hang him."

"I am no man-killer, nor one who cares to see my fellow-men suffer; but I know what this man Redfield has done, and my orders were to take him, dead or alive."

"By the aid of Landlord Larry and Doctor Dick, I secured his arrest, and have him safe here, to take with me to the fort when I go, after I have transacted my business here."

"If you attempt to take this man, I shall defend him with my life, and you will have the Government to settle the account with."

"As law-abiding men I advise you not to make the attempt you have determined upon, to hang this man."

The clear, resonant voice of the scout reached every ear, and when he finished speaking a number cheered him.

But some were unconvinced!

They wanted a hanging, and, as they expressed it, the tree-fruit was ready for the plucking, and the leader urged them on.

Landlord Larry then had his say, and commanded order.

They listened to his argument to the end, and again there were cheers.

But some were yet determined to hang the prisoner, and once more the leader persisted.

"We don't want no such characters in Last Chance, pard."

"We'll string him up, and then people will know how we treats murderers and thieves in Last Chance."

"I'm sorry Buffalo Bill, and the landlord and Doc, puts themselves ag'in us; but we means them no harm, and thar is enough o' us ter pull 'em away without hurting of 'em, and then do our work."

"Are you with me, pard?"

A yell greeted the words of the leader, and the crowd moved a few steps forward but halted at the loud command:

"Hold!"

It was the doctor who spoke, and drop-

ping his hands upon his revolvers quickly he had drawn them and said:

"See here, men, I shall back up Buffalo Bill with my life, and the man who makes the attempt to pull me away from this door, I swear to him it shall be his last act on earth."

There was no mistaking this language, and the quiet act of Landlord Larry and Buffalo Bill in also drawing their revolvers settled the fact that they would defend the prisoner, with their lives.

Seeing the determined stand made to protect Reddy, the better class of miners at once decided to act on the side of law, and one called out:

"We are with you, Buffalo Bill, for no man shall be taken from the custody of a Government officer in Last Chance, and disgrace our camps."

This settled the matter as far as all but the leader of the mob, and half a dozen followers were concerned.

He hated Reddy, feared him in a measure, and saw his chance to git rid of him.

So he called out:

"I say Reddy hangs, and if you wants ter protect him, Buffalo Bill, you fights me."

The man was talking to make a record, and become an acknowledged leader in Last Chance.

He had left his record in each mining-camp he had visited, as a bad man, a dead-shot and man-killer; but yet he had dreaded Roger Redfield from, as he confessed to some of his pards, the fact that he had dreamed that he had been fatally wounded in a fight, and the face of his slayer he knew was that of Reddy.

With his bold utterance of defiance at Buffalo Bill, he moved forward, revolver in hand, while he called out:

"Stand aside all, and see fair play."

"Buffalo Bill, you is my game!"

A border crowd knows when to obey, and does it promptly.

The miners scattered on each side, all but Doctor Dick and Landlord Larry, who still kept their place by Buffalo Bill's side.

Seeing that the man meant to attack him, Buffalo Bill, with lightning-like rapidity threw his revolver to a level, and with the report the hand of Colorado Kit, fell to his side, his own revolver which he had not been quick enough in using, dropping to the ground.

With a yell of rage and pain he shouted:

"You are still my game, Buffalo Bill!" and he drew a second revolver with his left hand.

But again the revolver of Buffalo Bill rung out, and this time the bullet smashed the left hand of Colorado Kit.

Amid the dead silence that followed Buffalo Bill said in his cool way:

"There is work for you, Doctor Dick."

"See to that man's wounds and I'll pay the bill."

A yell of admiration for the scout went up from the crowd at this, and just then the supper horn sounded and the miners went off talking busily over the deadly aim of Buffalo Bill, and the mercy he had shown Colorado Kit, when he could have killed him, as almost any one else would have done in his place.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A MAN OF NERVE.

AGAIN had the strained situation in which Buffalo Bill found himself in Last Chance, ended without death.

He had stood near to the man whom he had been forced to twice wound, while the miners crowded into the hotel, to enjoy their supper, which they always did, for Landlord Larry gave them the best, and had Chinese waiters to look after their comfort.

Bacon, game, hoecake, coffee and berries comprised the bill of fare, with tin plate, iron-pronged forks and pewter-spoon, with tin cups, as the service.

Doctor Dick had stepped quickly up to the wounded man at the words of Buffalo Bill, and said:

"Come to my cabin with me, for my instruments and medicines are there."

"Will you come, Mr. Cody, you and Landlord Larry?"

The two silently nodded assent, and the

four started for the doctor's cabin, Colorado Kit showing considerable nerve, when it was not known just how badly he was wounded.

"I shot for a flesh wound in the arm first, and to splinter the finger on the trigger the last time," said Buffalo Bill as they walked along, adding, by means of encouraging Colorado Kit:

"If my eye did not fail me, you are not badly wounded."

Colorado Kit made no reply, though he evidently suffered.

They had now reached the doctor's cabin, which he had improved in many ways since taking possession.

Some off-hand sketches in charcoal and water-colors adorned the walls, and rifles, revolvers, a sword, foils, masks, and boxing-gloves were tastefully put up here and there.

Rugs of fur were upon the floor, a gay Mexican *serape* was upon the cot as a spread, a table with pen, ink and paper stood in the center of the cabin, and a book-shelf held a dozen or more volumes.

Then there was a violin and guitar, a flute, and a number of Indian and Mexican souvenirs here and there.

Placing a bench and couple of chairs outside for his visitors, the doctor brought out his surgical-case, medicine-box, and some lint and a basin and put it upon the step near him.

"Will you help me, Mr. Cody?" he asked, not seeming to consider that he was asking Buffalo Bill to aid in repairing the damage he had done.

"Certainly," and Buffalo Bill stepped forward and aided in removing the coat and rolling up the sleeve on the wounded arm.

"Your eye did not fail you, Cody," remarked the doctor, thrusting his probe through the wound in the arm, which was above the elbow, and had not broken the bone, though it had grazed it.

"That wound can wait until I see the other one," he added, and he took up the hand, which Buffalo Bill firmly grasped.

Colorado Kit had not flinched at the probe, and he gave no evidence of suffering, when the doctor took hold of his fingers.

"Yes, this forefinger is shattered. It was just about to touch the trigger, and the end of the bone is crushed, so I'll have to amputate at the second joint, Kit."

"All right, Doc! You knows yer business, I guess," was the serene reply.

The doctor took from his case a sharp knife and began work, stopping a moment to ask:

"Do you wish to take chloroform, Kit?"

"What's that?"

"Something to deaden the pain, for it will be keen, as I have to unhinge the joint."

"No, I won't mind that, and I wants ter see yer do it."

"Take this cigar," said Buffalo Bill, lifting a cigar from his pocket and a match, for he admired the man's nerve.

He cut off the cigar end, placed it in Kit's mouth, lighted the match, and when the cigar was lit, Kit said in his quiet way:

"I hates ter give up a finger, Doc, for they don't grow out ag'in; but it can't be helped. It's my funeral, so go ahead with yer cuttin'."

"You are a game one, Kit," observed Landlord Larry.

"Born that way—my daddy and mammy was full o' grit before me."

Doctor Dick now took hold of the shattered finger, saying quietly:

"Hold the hand tight, Mr. Cody, please, and I'll do the rest."

"Now, Kit, get your bellows in tune."

"If you expect to hear me squeal, Doc, like a stuck pig, you is mistaken, see if yer hain't."

The doctor took hold of the finger now, examined it carefully, ran his knife along to the bone of the second joint, and the man did not flinch, though he puffed vigorously at the cigar.

Then the doctor cut into the flesh, in the shape of a V, and with a quick twist wrench-ed the joint loose, when he picked up the arteries and dressed the wound with a skill that proved him a master in his profession.

Not a groan came from the lips of the sufferer, though the sweat stood on his brow like beads.

He did not even try to draw back his hand, and Buffalo Bill said admiringly:

"I need not even hold your hand, pard."

"Waal, it's over now, and all I kin say is that I never enjoyed a smoke more in my life."

"I thank you for that cigar, Buffalo Bill," and the cigar was fairly chewed to the fire on it.

The second wound was quickly dressed, and then the doctor gave the man a glass of brandy, and said:

"Lie down there and rest awhile, Kit."

"Oh, no, I'm all right now, Doc. I'll go in and git my supper, making one of them Heathen Chinee feed me."

"Thanks, Doc, and you too, Buffalo Bill, for paying the bill."

"Some time we'll meet again, when may-be I kin do you two gents a favor."

"So-long," and the man walked away, while Doctor Dick called after him:

"Come every morning and evening, Kit, for me to dress your wounds."

"All right, Doc," he called back as he walked rapidly away toward the hotel.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE SCOUT AND DOCTOR DICK.

BUFFALO BILL, Doctor Dick and Landlord Larry went in to supper together.

The last miner had left the room, Colorado Kit having just gone out, after eating a hearty supper, the Chinee waiter said.

They enjoyed their meal apparently, and Buffalo Bill was evidently pleased with his new friend, Doctor Dick.

He found the man a genial companion, witty, educated, one who appeared to have seen much of the world, and who talked well.

Why such a man came to Last Chance he could not understand.

But the scout had not forgotten that, when he had told him he reminded him of Sergeant Manton Mayhew, Doctor Dick had said that he would have a talk with him about that resemblance.

Coming out of the supper-room they found that darkness had fallen, and the miners had adjourned to the saloons and gambling-dens, except a few who were smoking their pipes upon the benches that were scattered here and there among the trees.

Colorado Kit, as though determined to show his indifference to his wounds, with both arms in a sling, had gone to the gambling-den known as "Larry's Dive," and the landlord was in the office talking with his clerk.

"Landlord Larry gets a good brand of cigars for me, Mr. Cody," said Dr. Dick, "so suppose you come over to my cabin and enjoy one, while, if you are not well accommodated, I can put up a cot for you there, as I have an extra one."

"Thank you, I have very pleasant quarters, doctor, but I'll go over and have a smoke with you," was the scout's reply.

So over to the cabin they went, and Doctor Dick brought out some really fine cigars, and put a couple of chairs outside.

Lighting their cigars the two smoked for several moments in silence, each waiting for the other to speak.

At last Buffalo Bill broke the silence by saying:

"I told you to-day that you reminded me of Sergeant Manton Mayhew of the —th Cavalry."

"Yes."

"The more I see of you, the more you are like him; in fact, except that he wore a mustache, and you are clean shaven, you are a most striking likeness of the sergeant, in face, as well as form."

"Did you know him well?"

"No, for he was ordered to Fort Faraway with his company, as a reinforcement, and I guided the troops there on the march from Whipple."

"Several days after his arrival he was killed."

"I heard so."

"Will you tell me the story of his killing?"

"It seems that the one who took his life was off on a scout with his troop, when Sergeant Mayhew arrived, and they did not meet for some time."

"But one night Sergeant Mayhew went to the quarters of Sergeant Weston and the

two must have recognized each other as old foes.

"What occurred, no one seems to know, and the trial by court-martial brought out little from Weston."

"But Weston killed him?"

"Yes."

"What excuse did he give?"

"None, more than that he said that he acted in self-defense."

"Nothing more?"

"Nothing."

"Did he tell nothing of their having met before?"

"Not a word, though all believed that Weston had some strong provocation, as he was one of the best soldiers and most popular man in the army."

"And Mayhew?"

"Was unpopular."

"Why?"

"He was haughty, overbearing, high-tempered and a man whom all regarded as a mysterious character."

"Was anything known about his past?"

"Absolutely nothing."

"And of Weston's antecedents?"

"He also was a mystery, and yet he was greatly liked."

"Has any effort been made to find out about the two men?"

"Every effort, but without avail."

"And the result of the court-martial?"

"Was to sentence Weston to death."

"Thank Heaven for that."

"Sir?"

"I say thank Heaven for that."

"You knew Mayhew then?"

"Yes, and I'll tell you a secret after a few more questions."

"Well?"

"Was Weston executed?"

"He was not."

"Why?"

"He escaped a moment before the order was to be given for his execution."

"Escaped from hundreds of soldiers?"

"Yes, he was a daring man, and a dashing one."

"I had ridden to the headquarters just to try and get a reprieve, for Weston had saved my life, and I had been the cause of his enlisting."

"I failed to get the reprieve, rode up just at the last moment to report to the commanding officer, when Weston made a break, bounded upon my horse and got away, for none of the guns were loaded, and he was across the stream into the timber before he could be fired upon by the soldiers."

"So he escaped death?"

"For the time being only, for he made for the desert, and there we found him dead, some days after, lying by the body of his horse."

"He had starved to death in the desert."

"And again I say thank Heaven" exclaimed Doctor Dick sternly.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

DOCTOR DICK'S STORY.

BUFFALO BILL felt, when he heard the doctor express his gratification at the death of the slayer of Sergeant Mayhew, that the two were in someway connected.

The striking resemblance between Doctor Dick and the sergeant was not an accidental one the scout was assured.

Then there was an almost malignant glimmer in the eyes of the doctor, when he rejoiced in the death of Sergeant Weston, that showed he had some strong reason for wishing him dead.

Puffing furiously at his cigar a moment the doctor thus calmed himself, and then said:

"Can you keep a secret, Buffalo Bill?"

"I can, if it is requested of me."

"I will tell you one."

"Do not do so, unless you really wish to confide in me."

"I do."

"Well, I will keep your secret, doctor."

"My name is Mayhew."

"Ah!"

"Yes, Richard Mayhew."

"Well?"

"Sergeant Mayhew was my brother."

"I half suspected it."

"He was more."

"How so?"
"We were born at the same time."
"Twins."
"There is more to tell yet."
"Indeed?"
"My mother gave birth to three children."
"Triplets."
"Yes, and all boys."
"Well?"

"We all lived to grow up strong and healthy."

"You look it, and so did Sergeant Mayhew."

"And so did my brother Hugh."

"Hugh!" and Buffalo Bill slightly started.

"Yes, our names were Manton, Hugh and Richard."

"And then?"
Our parents were refined, educated people, and quite wealthy.

"Where we dwelt matters not, but we lived in a country village, and attending a country school met there a boy by the name of—well, never mind now, for I'll tell you later who he was."

"He was about our age, and we were great chums, for with my brother and that boy we formed a gay quartette."

"I was the first to suffer at his hands, for though appearing never to study and never being up in his letters, it was all put on, for he was a hard student at home, and when the examination day came he took the first prizes from me in everything, when I was sure of them, and all felt that I would win."

"I felt disgraced, and the more so when my sweetheart deserted me for him."

"Half broken-hearted I left home and went to sea, where I was taken as an assistant in the navy to a surgeon."

"He left home a year after, to also go into the navy as a midshipman."

"In his absence my old sweetheart had been won by my brother Manton, and, when she grew old enough they were engaged to be married."

"But before the event came off my rival returned home, his uniform dazzled the girl, his honeyed words won her back, and she deserted Manton for her old lover."

"It was said that he had secretly married her, and soon after his departure, he got into some trouble which forced him to resign from the navy."

"He returned home and never went near her, and broken-hearted she went into a convent, taking the veil, while he began to pay attention to a beautiful girl to whom my brother Hugh was engaged, my brother Manton having left home in his sorrow and coming West had gone to mining, which he gave up, after making nothing at it, to enter the army."

"The truth was his life had been wrecked by loving his sweetheart, whom he idolized."

"A fascinating man, this villain at once set to work to win my brother Hugh's lady-love from him."

"By false accusations against Manton he parted them, then won her regard, and her father took him into partnership with him in the banking business."

"What his hatred to my family was, I do not know, but as he got charge of the banking firm where all my father's business centered, he so managed his plot that he crushed him, sending him to the wall, and causing him to lose his every dollar."

"Indignation was so great against him that he was forced to leave the town, and he did so upon the eve of his marriage with the poor girl, whom he deserted, causing her to take her own life."

"My brother Hugh also came West and turned miner, and I fear went to the bad, for men called him a desperado, but it was all because he was driven to it by the acts of one whom he had once loved as a brother."

"Taking a fancy to medicine, I studied it aboard ship, and saving up my money, after cruising several years, graduated in a Western Medical College."

"I settled in the West to practice, and was doing splendidly, when suddenly I found I was the cause of suspicion for some reason."

"One night the Vigilantes waited upon me, accused me of being a fugitive from justice, and said that they intended to hang me."

"As my life was at stake, I defended my-

self, shot down several of them, sprung upon a horse and made my escape."

"Afterward I learned that the masked leader of the Vigilantes was none other than the bitter foe of my kindred."

"Broken up in my practice, and having stained my hand with blood, I became a wanderer, going to Mexico, and entering the service there as a surgeon."

"Though I stood well, I longed to get back among my own people, and returned recently to my home."

"My parents were dead, had died of a broken heart, and I held not a tie there to bind me, if I had dared remain, which I did not."

"So I went to California and practiced a year, then to the New Mexico mines, and turning gambler, drifted out here, and here I am making a fortune—but for whom?"

"Now, Buffalo Bill, let me tell you that the man who wrought ruin upon those of my name was Wallace Weston!"

CHAPTER XL.

A SUSPICION.

It was with the deepest of interest that Buffalo Bill had listened to the story of Doctor Dick.

The doctor had told it in a low, fervent manner, at times in a tone that was pathetic, and every word had carried conviction.

His story of Wallace Weston's treachery had dashed that idol of manhood to the ground, as it could not fail to do, when listening to the words of Doctor Dick.

Buffalo Bill felt sorry for the man before him, his new-found friend, and whether he had told the whole truth as to himself, he could not but feel that he was a man of mystery, one who had seen much, had known much of life, and had led a strange existence.

The secret was out apparently, if there was not more to tell, why Doctor Dick hid himself in a far Western mining-camp, when he was a man to adorn any society.

Then there came across the mind of the scout the remembrance that he had something to say.

He had heard of a desperado in the mines who was known as Black Heart Bill, but whom some one said bore the name of Mayhew.

So he asked:

"Was the man known as Black Heart Bill your brother?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Some one who had known him in the part told me that he had once been a gentleman, and that his name was Mayhew."

"It is with shame that I confess it, but poor Hugh's sorrows drove him to recklessness, and he became a desperado, I heard, though I trust not so bad as that."

"From all accounts he was a desperado, and of the worst type, for he gained by his cruel acts and man-killing the name of Black Heart Bill."

"Poor fellow."

"Do you know where he is now?"

"I do not, and I am anxious to find him, for I have enough for both of us, and far more, and I could redeem him."

"I am sorry to tell you, Doctor Dick, that it is too late."

The doctor started at this, his face paled, and he asked quickly:

"What do you mean, Mr. Cody?"

"I mean, doctor, that when I came here from the fort, I took quite a wide circuit, looking into a country with which I was not much acquainted."

"When I did not believe there was a human being to be found, Indian or pale-face, over in the Grand Canyon, I came upon a camp."

"It was the camp of pale-faces, I saw at a glance."

"There was every indication that several horses had been staked out there for perhaps weeks, and the amount of ashes, and cut wood told me the same thing."

"There was a large wicky-up, the bones of deer, heads and other indications of quite a stay there of several men."

"But, in searching about the camp, down upon the banks of a stream, at the base of a large quaking-aspen tree, I saw a grave."

"It had been covered over by logs, to prevent the body from being torn up by coyotes."

"Into the back of the tree, which you know is now white and soft, had been cut by a skilled carver the following," and Buffalo Bill took from his pocket a note-book, turned to a page and read:

"THIS GRAVE
MARKS THE LAST RESTING PLACE
OF

"HUGH MAYHEW,
alias

"BLACK HEART BILL, THE DESPERADO."

"KILLED IN A DUEL WITH ONE HE
HAD CRUELLY WRONGED.
TO THE DEAD—PEACE."

"Buffalo Bill, that is my brother Hugh who rests in that grave."

"I know it, for my heart tells me so, and that leaves but me, for Manton is also gone."

"Killed by one whom he wronged, and that one means Wallace Weston."

"The name tells you that it is your brother, Doctor Dick, and the alias also, for I said he was known as Black Heart Bill."

"Too true."
"But Wallace Weston did not kill him."
"Why do you say so?"

"Have you forgotten that he is dead?"
"But he escaped execution, you told me."
"True, to die upon the desert."

"Can you prove this?"
"I was the guide who led Lieutenant Tompkins and his men in pursuit."
"And you say that he starved to death?"

"Yes."
"You know this?"
"I do."
"How do you know it, Mr. Cody?"

"We came as I told you to his dead body upon the desert lying by the side of a large rock that stood alone."

"The wolves had begun to devour him, but his body was there in his uniform, with my saddle and bridle near, for he had fled upon my horse."

"We buried him there, and rolled the large rock upon his grave."

"And yet I have a strong suspicion, a belief that Wallace Weston is not dead—that he still lives," said Doctor Dick in a low, earnest voice.

CHAPTER XLI.

PROOF WANTED.

DOCTOR DICK had heard Buffalo Bill's story of his finding the deserted camp, and the grave near it, with the inscription cut upon it.

He had seemed to feel deeply the death of his brother, bad as he appeared to be, and his face and manner showed that he had loved the erring one devotedly.

"We were three, yet like one, nearer than brothers even are wont to be, for we were of the same age, strangely alike in form and feature, yes in voice and manner curious even."

"Now Hugh has followed Manton to the grave and I alone am left."

"Mr. Cody, do you know who killed my brother Hugh?"

"I certainly do not, sir."
"I do."
"Whom do you suspect of the deed?"
"But one man of course."

"Who may he be?"
"But one man would have done the deed."
"I am not so sure of that, for what I have heard of Black Heart Bill, he had many enemies."

"Still that one man killed him."
"Who?"

"Why, Wallace Weston, of course."
"But I told you Weston was dead."

"I do not believe it—pardon me; I do not mean to doubt you, but I do doubt the fact of his death."

"I was the guide of the party that found his body, as I told you."

"Yes, his body had been torn by the coyotes."

"Partially, yes."
"Was his face disfigured?"
"Yes, very much so."

"Beyond recognition?"

"In a measure it was, but there was the black hair, the beard of several days' growth, the ring he wore on his little finger, uniform, hat, boots, all to denote that it was Sergeant Weston, while my saddle, bridle and outfit was there."

"He ran off with your horse?"

"Yes, he rode him away in his escape."

"Was it your horse?"

"No, for I have that animal now with me."

"How did that happen?"

"He pushed my horse, which had been hard ridden by me when I went to try and git the reprieve, until he broke down."

"Just when the animal failed him he found a stray horse, mounted him in full view of his pursuers and pushed into the desert."

"Their horses being used up they returned, and I was sent with a fresh party, under the same officer, Lieutenant Tompkins, to follow the trail."

"We did so and found the body as stated."

"Would you take oath that it was the body of Wallace Weston?"

"I never swear upon an uncertainty, Doctor Dick, and it may be possible that it was not Weston; but, to the best of my knowledge and belief it certainly was."

"Now I cannot believe it was."

"Why?"

"Well, the man who cut that inscription into the tree where my brother was buried, stated that he was killed by one he had cruelly wronged."

"Yes."

"I believe that Wallace Weston killed him."

"But you say that he had been wronged by Weston."

"Very true; but that was his slayer's way of putting it."

"Still he had wronged many a man, from all accounts of him."

"Yet no one knew him as *Hugh Mayhew*."

"Ah!"

"His name was cut there."

"Yes."

"Hugh Mayhew, alias Black Heart Bill."

"Yes."

"Then Wallace Weston alone knew who he was and he killed him."

"Might he not, before he died, made known who he was?"

"No, Mr. Cody, for the sake of those dear to him he would have hidden the fact that Black Heart Bill was Hugh Mayhew."

"No, he was killed by Wallace Weston, who I feel sure is not dead."

"Well, I can say no more than I have to convince you that he is."

"Where was this lone camp?"

"It was some twenty miles from the Grand Canyon of the Colorado, and at a large spring in a heavy piece of timber."

"A beautiful valley ran down to the Grand Canyon, a view of which could be obtained from the camp."

"Did you notice from whence the trail had come?"

"It was too long after to discover any trail of course, but I noticed holes dug near, which could only have been done by a dog."

"Ah! and I have heard that my brother's constant companion and truest friend was a large dog, half Siberian bloodhound, half mastiff."

"Yes, I have also heard the same thing, doctor."

"Well, Mr. Cody, I thank you for your kindness in bearing with me, and though I am convinced that my brother Hugh is dead, I am equally sure that it was Wallace Weston who killed him, and that our old enemy is still alive."

"Some day I will know, for I want proof one way or the other and will have it."

"If he lives, then it will be his life or mine, for I am revengeful," and the face of Doctor Dick showed that he meant what he said.

CHAPTER XLII

LARRY'S DEN.

WHEN Buffalo Bill left the doctor's cabin the latter escorted him, remarking as they walked toward the hotel:

"You must make my shanty your home,

Mr. Cody, whenever you feel like coming there."

"I will show you where I keep my key, so if I am away go in and help yourself."

The scout thanked him and said that he would drop over often.

He was greatly impressed with the strange man, whom cruel circumstances seemed to have driven far from a field where he could have made name and fortune for himself in his profession.

He liked the man, and knew that in spite of his light-hearted manner he was one who suffered, who carried a skeleton in his breast.

But he was glad to have met him and formed his friendship, and frankly confessed that he owed to him a very great debt of gratitude, one which he hoped to some day repay in some manner.

The scout had also a dim doubt in his mind that after all Doctor Dick might be right as to Wallace Weston being alive, though, when he reviewed all the circumstances, the seeming certainty of his death, he could not but feel that it was strange how the presentiment that he lived would haunt him.

"What do you say to a look in upon the gamblers, Mr. Cody?" said the doctor, as the two reached the hotel.

"I am willing."

"Then we'll drop in at Larry's Den, my favorite resort.

"Do you gamb'e?"

"I bet on a horse-race, sometimes, seldom on cards or games of chance."

"Well, give me a hundred and I'll play it for you, with as much of my own, for I will win."

"You appear positive."

"I am."

"See if I am not a true prophet."

The scout hesitated an instant, then took out a roll of bills and handed five twenties to the Doctor Sport.

Then they entered the gambling saloon known as Larry's Den.

It was built of logs, a hundred feet long by sixty in width, about twelve feet high, and with a slanting roof.

There were windows along the sides, two doors of entrance, one on either side, a bar at one end, with a door behind it, and which was kept closed.

A dirt floor, with some score of board tables and benches completed the furnishing of the place, with the exception of a dozen mining-lamps.

The place was crowded with miners, and a cloud of tobacco smoke filled the room, while nearly every one was engaged in gambling, bags of gold-dust and nuggets being the stakes played for and recklessly put up on the turn of a card, sometimes a man's month's work going at one sweep.

Landlord Larry was there, at his table in front of the center of the bar, and which was raised in, taking in his commissions, changing money, and keeping the account of sales of liquor and tobacco.

He bowed pleasantly to the doctor and scout as they came in, and a general hush fell for a moment upon the crowd, when a voice called out:

"Three cheers for Doctor Dick and his pard, Buffalo Bill!"

The cheers were given with a vengeance, and the two men raised their hats and walked up to where the landlord sat.

"Do you play, Bill?"

"No, Larry, not to-night."

"Then have a seat here by me, for Doc always gambles."

"Yes, it is my greatest pleasure."

Buffalo Bill took the proffered seat, an honor never before conferred by Landlord Larry, and Doctor Dick slipped into a chair at a table near and began to gamble.

Just then a man came and stood near Buffalo Bill who, glancing up, recognized Colorado Kit, who was there with both his hands in a sling.

"Well, pard, I hope you are feeling better," said Buffalo Bill, pleasantly.

"I'll be all right in time, I guesses."

"I don't mind it when I gits pinched."

"You certainly take it coolly."

"I takes my medicine when I has ter."

"Does yer stay long in Last Chance?"

"Some days, I think; for I am looking about the mines, and have some business with Landlord Larry."

"Well, I has no hard feelings ag'in' yer."

"I shu'd hev known better than to fool with a buzz-saw," and Colorado Kit walked off, while Larry whispered:

"You must keep your eye on him, Bill, or he will do you."

"I believe it's a blind, his wearing both hands in a sling."

"No, he was badly hurt each time, and do you know I do not believe he is treacherous, yet I'll be on my guard," and Buffalo Bill glanced over at the table where Doctor Dick was playing, and saw that he was winning steadily.

"That's a way the doctor has."

"Some swears he is a sharp, and cheats, but if he is, no eye has been quick enough to catch him at it, and it would be hard for the man who accused him of playing double—Ah! see there!" and Landlord Larry pointed to the doctor's table where there was trouble brewing.

CHAPTER XLIII.

AN ACCUSER.

THERE was certainly trouble over at the doctor's table.

One of the miners and a man known to be a terror, as he himself always said:

"A hard man from Wayback," had suddenly drawn a revolver and covered Doctor Dick.

The hush of death fell upon the scene, and not a man moved in all the room, only gazed at the actors.

The doctor sat unmoved, his face not changing color, and a cigar between his lips.

Upon the table before him were the cards he had just put down, and his left hand rested upon the pile of money taken on the game, and which his cards said he had won.

His right hand also rested upon the table, and there he sat quietly gazing at his antagonist, who was known as "Headlight Joe."

He did not belie his looks, for his face was pitted with the result of small-pox, his nose was broken, one eyelid was gone, and the stare of his eye had gained him the name of Headlight Joe.

He also in addition had one ear slit, as though it had been marked as a reminder of ownership, and a scar was across his left cheek where a bullet had cut its way.

His shoulders were massive and round, and of powerful build, he was a dangerous man to grapple with, while he was known to be a fatal shot, as several mounds in the Last Chance burying-ground stood as mute reminders.

If any one in the camps liked Headlight Joe, it was not suspected, and yet all treated him with marked respect.

He owned a paying mine, but hired help to work it, for he never touched pick or shovel himself.

With plenty of money apparently, he gambled most of the time, and almost invariably played a winning game.

By some strange circumstance he had never before played with the doctor, but had boldly said that it was not phenomenal luck that made Doctor Dick win, but expert handling of more cards than were allowed in a pack.

"Some night I'll play a game with him, and if I catch him cheating, Last Chance will have to advertise for a new doctor," he said.

The opportunity came that night when Doctor Dick went into Larry's Den with Buffalo Bill.

The doctor was on the hunt for some one to play with, when suddenly Headlight Joe's partner arose and said:

"I'm done, for the pocket is empty."

"Find another sucker, Joe."

"Maybe you'll play, Doc?" said Joe, just as Doctor Dick was passing.

"I do not mind, thank you," and he dropped into the chair just vacated.

The money was staked, and the game was begun, and ending, the doctor was winner of several hundreds.

Headlight Joe said nothing, merely puffed at his pipe and blew volumes of smoke into the face of Doctor Dick, who was smoking a cigar, but paid no attention to the rudeness of his adversary.

Again Doctor Dick won, and so it continued until the fifth game ended and Head

light Joe had seen raked over to the other side of the table gold and bills amounting to over three thousand dollars.

Then it was that he suddenly drew a revolver and leveled it at the doctor, his elbow resting upon the table, his finger upon the trigger, while he said, in a voice that all could hear:

"See here, my fancy Gold King, I accuses you of playing me."

"Do you mean that I cheat?" coolly asked the doctor.

"Waal now I hain't up in Queen Victoria English, but that is just how I intended ter express myself."

"Well, you have the drop on me dead sure, so I have a proposition to make."

"Leave that dust jist thar on ther table and make it; but ef yer attempts ter move yer hands, my gun goes off, and everybody knows death follows in ther wake o' my bullet."

"I do not fear you, Headlight, and I am not afraid to die; but I do not wish to be disgraced by dying by the hands of such as you and sc I have a proposition to make."

The voice of Doctor Dick was murmured, his face calm and his eyes only seemed to show feeling, for they were ablaze with anger.

"Out with it, and quick, for I'm hungry to kill yer."

"You accuse me of cheating?"

"I do."

"In what way?"

"I says you has other cards in yer sleeve, or about yer, and plays 'em at will, for you is a card sharp."

"You has cheated hundreds o' poor miners here, but yer can't play no fraud game on Headlight Joe, for I keeps my eyes open."

"So I see," laconically said the doctor, alluding to the lidless eye, and several laughed, which caused the face of Joe to grow black with passion, while he said:

"Laugh away, yer devils; but this are my night fer populatin' graveyards, see if it hain't when I gits rid o' this Gold Bug."

"My proposition is, that I surrender my weapons to Landlord Larry and then let Buffalo Bill search me thoroughly."

"If any card is found upon me, I am willing to be taken out by the Vigilantes and hanged."

"If not, then we step ten paces apart and you answer to me for this insult."

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE BITER BITTEN.

A MURMUR of satisfaction followed this proposition of Doctor Dick, but Headlight Joe responded:

"I'm agreeable ter all except two things."

"Name them."

"In the fu'st place yer tarns yer weepons over ter my pard, Sam Sully."

"I'll make that compromise for peace."

"Now ther second."

"Name it."

"That I wants my pard Breakneck, to s'arch yer fer extra keerds."

"Why not Buffalo Bill?"

"I won't trust him."

"You will not trust him?"

"No"

"Why not?"

"He'll play inter yer hands."

"See here, Headlight, I yield to your friend Sam Sully, though I know him to be a rascal, and I propose an honorable man to search me, instead of your pard Breakneck, who is another of your kind."

"I will yield no more."

"Then I will have ter kill yer fu'st and s'arch yer after."

"Draw trigger and you die on the instant," and all eyes turned to see that Buffalo Bill had Headlight Joe covered, and had so placed himself that Sam Sully and Breakneck, who had been pointed out to him by Landlord Larry, were also in range.

Headlight Joe's face changed color, but he did not take his eye off of Doctor Dick, or lower his revolver, while he said:

"See, yer pard is already chippin' in and has me covered—does yer call that honest, Doc?"

"Certainly, when you accused him of dishonesty, and hold me at your mercy."

"Come, do you accept my proposition or

not, for I can make terms now, I see, with Cody's aid."

"I does, let him s'arch you."

"Pardon me, but I refuse, as I prefer to keep you and those precious pals of yours under the muzzle of my revolver."

"Let Landlord Larry do the searching."

A cheer went up at these words of Buffalo Bill, who, all now knew, saw through the trick of Headlight Joe to get out from under the cover of the scout's revolver.

Headlight Joe was becoming rattled, with the situation he had found himself in, and so he said quickly:

"Landlord Larry, you do the s'arching, and do it open."

"I've a notion to clip that broken nose of yours, Joe, with a bullet, for insinuating I wouldn't act square; but I won't quarrel with a man on the brink of the grave," and stepping up to the Gold King, Larry continued:

"This is a dirty piece of business, Doctor Dick, for one to be in, but I have often heard hints that you don't play fair, and so I wish to settle the complaints at once, so will give all a chance to see if this man has not lied ag'in yer."

With this he took off the doctor's belt of arms, and laid them upon the table.

Beneath was a buckskin belt of gold and bells, and this was put on the other.

The velvet coat was then drawn off and searched, and a silk handkerchief alone found in it.

His vest followed, and an elegant watch, diamond-studded, and a chain of massive links were placed on the table.

A small note-book was in the vest, and a penknife, nothing else.

In the pockets of his pants were found a bunch of keys, and a small gold pencil and pen combined, with a diamond set in one end of it.

There was also a roll of bills and a pair of small gold-mounted derringers in the rear pistol-pockets.

The long, handsome boots even were drawn off and not a sign of a card was found.

The doctor submitted quietly to the indignity, and he felt that all who looked on were doing him justice.

Headlight Joe still kept him covered with his revolver, while Buffalo Bill held his weapon covering the doctor's accuser, while he also kept Sam Sully and Breakneck in range.

"I suppose you are satisfied," said Landlord Larry sternly, turning to Headlight Joe.

"Well, I dunno that I is," was the answer, and instantly the room seemed full of jeers, at the hissing that followed his words.

Seeing a dangerous demonstration toward him, as shown by the hissing of the crowd, Headlight said:

"You says I is mistaken, Larry?"

"I do."

"You clears ther Doc then, of cheatin'?"

"I do, as does every other man in this room, unless they be your two pards there."

"Well, I can only act like a gentleman, and apologize.

"Here, Doc, here's my hand."

Headlight Joe held out his hand, anxious to square matters, and to get out from under Buffalo Bill's pistol-muzzle.

But Doctor Dick did not take the proffered hand, but said:

"You would find it impossible to act like a gentleman, and as to an apology I refuse to accept it, while it was not the compact between us."

"What were?"

The revolver had been lowered now, though a quick glance showed that Buffalo Bill had not followed suit in that respect, for Headlight Joe was still covered.

The doctor coolly put on his coat and vest, resumed his hat, buckled on his money-belt, then his weapons, and continued:

"If I am wrong, I am willing to be corrected; but my idea was, that if you failed to convict me of cheating, you were to give me satisfaction, right here in this room."

"Waal, hain't I apologized?"

"I accept no apology from such as you," and Doctor Dick pocketed his winnings which were on the table.

"You means fight?"

"Certainly."

"If I raises my gun that durned scout bores a hole in my head."

"Take off your weapons and lay them on the table as I do."

"I'll be murdered."

"No one will harm you, Joe," said the landlord.

Headlight Joe was cowed.

He had gotten into a scrape, and knew when he had enough.

He glanced appealingly toward his pals, Breakneck and Sam Sully.

They were white-faced and unable to help him.

"Say, Doc, everybody is ag'in' me, 'cause I thought I had caught you cheatin', and you refuse to accept my sorry for it, and wants ter murder me."

"You have the name of being a dead shot and quick as a cat in your movements."

"Landlord Larry can arrange distance and give the word to fire, so lose no time, for I am losing my temper, and you know you said this was your night to populate graveyards, so start in with me."

"I caves, I does, pard."

A yell went up at this, and Headlight Joe added:

"I knows when I has bit off more than I kin chew, so let it go at that, Doc."

"No, you and those two pals of yours must leave Last Chance to-night."

"But I has a mine here, and they works it for me."

"Landlord Larry, what is the mine of this man worth?"

"He offered it to me for five thousand, cash, doctor, but I was afraid of it at that price."

"I'll pay him that price, and now."

"Landlord Larry draw up the papers, please."

"Does yer mean I has got ter go?"

"I do, and these two men, and the other two who work for you, for I know you to be a bad lot."

"If you do not go, you have got to fight, and if I am not mistaken, when I tell the Vigilantes what I know of you and your four hirelings, they will invite you to remain."

"Give me the cash and I'll go," cried Headlight Joe, excitedly casting a quick glance at Buffalo Bill, who no longer had him covered, but kept his eye upon him.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE EXILES.

THE papers for the sale of the mine of Headlight Joe to Doctor Dick, were correctly drawn up by Landlord Larry, and duly signed.

Landlord Larry and Buffalo Bill attached their signatures as witnesses, and then the money was paid over, the doctor turning to the landlord and asking him to pay it for him, for one of the advantages of the Last Chance Hotel was that it had a strong room where the miners could deposit their winnings and gold-finds, and have Larry as banker.

The doctor also banked with Larry, who alone knew how much he was worth.

"We'll git out if it's ther desire of ther miners that we goes," said Headlight Joe as he pocketed the money.

"It is my decision, and you have two hours to leave town."

"The store is closed, and we wants our horses shod."

"Landlord Larry will open the store for you to purchase what you wish, and if Blacksmith Ben will shoe your horses tonight, I'll give him fifty dollars for the job."

"What do you say, Ben?" and Doctor Dick turned to a man standing near, who answered:

"I'll go yer, Doc, but they should pay."

"You hear, all of you, so now go, and I warn you not to be within the borders of Last Chance when I go on my rounds in the morning, for I am going to ask the Vigilantes to escort me."

The exiled men well knew what such an escort meant, and they seemed most anxious to get away.

The blacksmith left to shoe their horses, which one of them would lead to the camp, and really they needed little done to them, only they used the horse-shoeing as an excuse for delay.

The others filled several packs at the bar and then adjourned to the store, which Larry had opened for them, and there they purchased provisions and other things they needed.

Their next move was to the mine, where each one had a snug little sum hidden away, Headlight Joe having been in ignorance of what those he hired were laying up for themselves.

The four men managed to slip away from Headlight Joe for a short while, to get their secreted belongings, but when they reached the mine were startled to find some one there who called out:

"Git! this mine belongs to Doctor Dick the Gold King, and trespassers is shot dead."

"Light out!"

They groaned in agony of spirit but obeyed without a second's delay, "lighting out" in a way that showed they were not anxious to tarry there. Blacksmith Ben soon had all their horses in good shape, six in number; upon one was packed their belongings, and mounting, with Headlight Joe in the lead, the "Exiles from Last Chance," as Landlord Larry called them, rode down the valley and at dawn were well out of the range of camps, for they had no desire to have the Vigilantes interview them.

When they had left the Den, Doctor Dick was congratulated upon having driven them away, for they were known to be a very bad lot, and many thought that Headlight Joe's mine never paid a dollar, but was kept as a blind while he and his men stole gold from others.

Then too Headlight Joe's eye was called a Hoo-doo by many, and all were glad to get rid of him and his gang.

"You saved my life, Cody, for that man meant to kill me, when he found his charge was untrue."

"Let me see, I have just three thousand dollars to split in two with you, for that was the amount of my winning on your hundred and mine," and Doctor Dick handed over the money as the two parted at the hotel door for the night.

The next morning Buffalo Bill was up early, and mounting one of Landlord Larry's horses, so as to allow his own to rest, he rode out upon the trail of the five exiles.

It was a plain trail to follow and went out upon the stage road.

Buffalo Bill was glad to get a chance to visit the scene of the hold-up of the coach, which had been robbed when Bud Benton was killed.

He knew that the coach was expected in soon, and wished to head it off and have a word with the driver.

The new man was one who had made a record on the Overland.

He had been several times wounded by road-agents, and also by Indians, had run a dozen gantlets with outlaws, and been chased time and again by red-skins.

Once his passengers had been massacred, and he, though wounded, mounted one of his horses, and with the mail and booty had made his escape.

Dave Dockery was his name, and he had promptly volunteered for the drive to Last Chance and back when he heard of Bud Benton being killed.

Six miles out from Last Chance Buffalo Bill saw the coach.

It was halted and a number of horsemen were upon either side of it.

Without a moment's hesitation Buffalo Bill rode forward at full speed.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE CROSS BY THE TRAILSIDE.

The clatter of Buffalo Bill's horse attracted the attention of those about the stage, and looking back they saw who it was that was coming.

At once they rode on, for though they were five to one, they did not care to take any chances with a man of the scout's record, and besides, they persuaded themselves that he was not alone.

As they got a quarter of a mile from the coach they saw Dave Dockery draw rein and the scout halt by the side of his wheelers.

"Well, Dave, you had company just now," said Buffalo Bill, who had met the driver often before.

"Yes, Bill, and it did my heart good to see you, for I recognized you the moment I seen you."

"How are you, old man?" and leaning from his box Dave grasped the scout's hand warmly.

"All right, thanks, Dave."

"I was told that you were driving on this trail now."

"You always take the most dangerous runs, Dave."

"Kinder like it, Bill; but what are you doing here?"

"I came out prospecting, and wanted to see you."

"Where was it that Bud was killed, for I pitched upon a spot a mile back toward the camps."

"You are right."

"I'll show you when we get there."

"Hitch your horse to my off leader and ride with me."

This Buffalo Bill did, and asked:

"Had those fellows intended to hold you up, Dave?"

"That's just it, I believe they did."

"You see I recognized them, so didn't get on my guard, and they halted me."

"They said they had sold out in the camps, and was going prospecting; but I seen them making signs at each other, and heard one say in a whisper:

"It can be done with no risk."

"That put me on my guard, and I believe they were just getting ready to level on me, when they heard hoofs and saw you."

"I'm mighty glad you came, Bill, for I've got a clean thirty thousand aboard in bank money."

"What was up with those fellows?"

"They are exiles from home, Dave, for Doctor Dick gave them advice last night which they followed."

"Sent out for good?"

"Yes."

"That's clever in the Doc, for they are a bad lot."

"You saved me, Bill, for with six miles start, they would have some hours yet before any one would come out from Last Chance to look me up, and it would be night before any party could start, and then darkness would hide the trail and they'd never catch 'em."

"Bill, I thank you; but what do you think of Doctor Dick?"

"A brave, handsome fellow, and a man who has seen much, and carries a heart full of troubles, I think."

"Yes, and generous to a fault. I'm stuck on him, Bill; but here we are at the hold-up of the coach, where Bud Benton was killed."

Dave Dockery drew rein in the little glen, which a stream wound through, and where a wooden cross of cedar stood to mark the spot.

Buffalo Bill had seen the cross as he went by, but had not halted, for somehow he had a dread that Headlight Joe and his gang might hold up Dave Dockery, and Landlord Larry had told him there would be big money on board.

He saw the trail of the exiles sticking to the coach road, and so hastened on, and, as Dave had said, saved him from a hold-up, perhaps death, for the men were desperate, expected money was on the coach and knew that they had every chance to escape.

They had been thwarted and registered an oath of vengeance against Buffalo Bill.

Upon the cedar cross was painted:

"IN MEMORY
OF
"BUD BENTON,
"DRIVER OF THE OVERLAND COACH
TO
"LAST CHANCE,
AND MURDERED HERE WITH TWO OF HIS
PASSENGERS."

"Some day a reckoning will come."

"I put it there, Bill, for I liked Bud, and some day it may be my time to go; but I hope before I do I'll get a chance to even up for poor Bud, for I know that there are those who will avenge me."

"Stage driving is deadly work, Bill, but I like it and will take chances as they come."

"Will you ride on with me?"

"No, and you need not speak of having seen me."

"All right, but it's a shame for you to lose the benefit of what you did for me."

"Let me tell Landlord Larry."

"If you wish, but no one else, for I will tell the doctor what I found his exiles doing."

"Keep your eyes open, Dave, and report to Landlord Larry, mind you, no one else, all that you discover of a suspicious nature, for I am out for game."

"Man-hunting, eh?"

"About that, Dave."

"Well, you'll get 'em in time."

"I'll see you at the camps, for you know I don't go out for a week."

"I'm allowed to choose my own days to go and come, so as to throw the road-agents off my trail; but I always tells Larry what day to look for me."

"Yes, he told me I would meet you—" and with a wave of his hand Buffalo Bill rode on along the trail after the exiles.

CHAPTER LXVII.

A DREAD OF EVIL.

DAVE DOCKERY ran into Last Chance without further adventure, and when Landlord Larry made known that he had brought safely in a valuable mail and a large sum of paper money, there were three cheers given for the gallant driver, and he was urged scores of times to—

"Take suthin', Dave."

But Dave had a cool head, and knew when he had enough, and just when to quit, so did not "get off his base."

He told Landlord Larry of meeting Headlight Joe and his gang, and his belief that they intended to rob him, and that Buffalo Bill, believing that they had held him up, rode to the rescue, not counting odds against him.

"I've a mind to start Doctor Dick and the Vigilantes on their trail, and that would mean tree fruit, Dave."

"You know, or at least I'll tell you, that Doctor Dick is captain of the Vigilantes now."

"He is?" surprisedly.

"Yes, he was elected at the last secret meeting in my place, for I had all I could do here."

"Nobody knows just who the Vigilantes are?"

"No, Dave; and you must not tell; but I let you know in case you may have to call on them some day when I am not about."

"I'll keep the secret, Larry."

"There are just twenty-five of them, and they go masked, you know, wear black gowns, red masks, and cover their horses up, head and body, saddle, bridle and all, with red calico, so nobody knows them, or the animals they ride."

"It's a great thing, for that keeps down the bad element, and you've got it in Last Chance about as bad as any place I know, Larry."

"You bet we have! But, do you know Doctor Dick has done much to keep back the bad men, for they don't understand him, what he is, or what he means."

"You see, he came here a mysterious man, and he is more of a mystery now than ever, and the bad men are afraid of him."

"You should have seen him last night when he was under Headlight Joe's gun."

"Why, he was as cool as ice in San Francisco Mountains, and don't you forget it! All of us thought he was gone."

"What saved him?"

"His nerve for one, and Buffalo Bill for two."

"If Buffalo Bill shot, toes turned up, though he don't draw trigger unless he has to."

"He didn't last night, but he cowed Headlight and held him so until matters was arranged satisfactory all round."

"You see, the result was Headlight took a journey and his four miners concluded to go with him to keep him out of trouble."

"Or themselves; but, Buffalo Bill didn't tell me of this."

"Buffalo Bill is as modest as a woman at

her first love-talk, when he is in it where blood may be drawn.

"But he has cut quite a figure here, I can tell you, and goes back with an army deserter who will get a rope neck-lace or I am away off the trail."

"Takes him back with him, do you say?"

"Yes, that is what he is here for—to run the deserter in."

"Who is he?"

"Reddy."

"I know him; a man whom nature meant to make a brunette, but, after giving him black-eyes, found out the wigs had give out, so run him in as a blonde."

"That is the man."

"His eyes look wicked, but his hair plays saint."

"You know him, Dave."

"Who goes back with Bill?"

"Only Reddy."

"Well, Bill has got to keep his eyes open. It is a pity that Headlight isn't honest, so he could take him along to keep watch with that eye of his, which never sleeps."

"I'm a-thinking that it is that same eye will give Bill trouble when he goes."

"Maybe."

"Where is Bill now?"

"Off on some trail, and he don't go wrong, you may gamble on that."

"Well, I'm awful glad he come, and, as he won't say a word about what he has done, I'm going to write a letter to the commandant and tell him the whole story."

"That is right, and I'll sign it that he saved me from turning up my toes, and the boodle I had along."

"It's a good idea; but, here comes the Doc."

Just then Doctor Dick entered.

He had been on his round of professional calls, for he never neglected any miner, however poor he was, or if only a trifle ill.

He greeted Dave pleasantly and asked about Buffalo Bill.

"Do you say he started out on the stage trail this morning Larry?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

"He said he would prospect a little."

Dave did not say a word about having met the scout, and Landlord Larry having been told Buffalo Bill's wish also kept silent.

"Well, I don't half like that, for I am sure there are men here who fear Buffalo Bill enough to pick him out of his saddle, when they cannot be found out."

"I'll take a ride along the stage trail myself," and Doctor Dick went to the stable, mounted a fine horse, stopped at his cabin and throwing a repeating rifle across his saddle, rode out of the camps at a gallop.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

A GRUESOME TOY.

DOCTOR DICK, once out of the camps, and where he might meet any miners, rode forward at a sweeping gallop.

He kept his pace up until he reached the scene where Bud Benton had been killed, and there he drew rein suddenly.

The cause of this was at discovering a man standing by the cross that marked the fatal spot.

In the shadows of the timber he had not recognized that the man was Buffalo Bill.

"Ho, doctor, what is your hurry?"

"Ah, Cody, I was on the hunt for you."

"Anything wrong?"

"No more than Landlord Larry said that you had gone out on this trail this morning, and I feared you might have gotten into an ambush."

"Oh, no; from Headlight Joe, you mean?"

"Yes, and others, for with the evil element in Last Chance you are not popular."

"That I take as a compliment."

"It is; but I did not know but that you might have gotten into trouble, so rode out to see."

"I thank you, doctor, but I am all right."

Did Dave get in safe?"

"Yes, I saw him."

"I am glad of that."

"You saw him?"

"Yes."

"He did not speak of it."

"We were together for a little while only, and then I went on along the trail."

"After Headlight?"

"Yes."

"Have they kept on?"

"Yes, I followed them to their noon camp, and after a short rest they went on."

"We are done with them then."

"I hope so, doctor."

"Here is where poor Bud Benton was killed."

"And the two passengers, I see," and Buffalo Bill glanced on the inscription on the cross."

"Yes, it was a red piece of work; but let me tell you in confidence, Cody, that I am captain now of the Vigilantes."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, I was elected in Landlord Larry's place who resigned."

"I am glad to hear it."

"You know here the Vigilantes are a secret body of men, and I have twenty-four under me."

"They are enough."

"Especially when it is not known what our strength is, and also a secret as to who we are."

"That is it."

"Yes, we turn out only when there is reason for it, and then go masked, wear long gowns, like dominos, and even our horses are completely covered."

"That makes you stronger in the eyes of the miners, and more feared."

"So I thought, for it was my idea to have it so."

"Well, you will not be long in getting rid of your worst characters in Last Chance, and then the camps will build up; but as it is now outsiders are afraid to come here."

"We will do our best; but shall we return?"

"I am ready, and yet I would prefer to ride in after dark, for I do not care to have the miners think I was trailing Headlight Joe and his men."

"All right; we'll go slow and that will fetch us in after dark."

"Then we will have supper and I have a proposition to make to you."

"I will be glad to hear it, doctor."

Two hours after the two men were seated in the doctor's cabin, having had supper, and were enjoying their cigars.

Suddenly Doctor Dick said:

"Cody, I am a natural-born gambler, and I told you I had a proposition to make to you?"

"Yes."

"You bought an interest in the Gilt Edge Mine yesterday?"

"Yes."

"For yourself?"

"Yes, and a few shares for some officers at the fort."

"Well, you won fifteen hundred last night."

"Rather you did for me."

"It is the same thing."

"Well?"

"Now, if you will put up your share in the Gilt Edge, and your fifteen hundred up against three thousand in cash, I'll throw you to win or lose."

"It is against my nature to back down, doctor, so I'll go you," assented the scout, with a smile.

The doctor took a box from a shelf and placing it upon the table said:

"These are my luck dice—see, they are of solid gold and the spots are made with diamonds."

Buffalo Bill examined the four dice with evident relish.

He saw that they were of solid gold, and each one had diamonds for the spots, eighteen in all, and the four represented seventy-two precious stones, a half carat each.

"These are pretty toys, and worth a snug sum, which you seem to throw about very recklessly, doctor."

"Yes, they are worth, with the box, two thousand dollars—look at the box."

Buffalo Bill took it up and saw that it was a tiny human skull, rimmed around the lower part with a gold band, and hollowed out so as to hold the dice.

"Rather a gruesome toy after all, doctor."

"Yes, but it is a weird fancy of mine I picked the skull up on the prairie, and had it

made into a dice-box in San Francisco, while the diamonds I secured when our ship touched on the African Coast, and the gold I dug out of a mine in Mexico."

"Try your luck, for there are my three thousand, and the doctor put the money on the table."

"I warn you that I am lucky."

"So am I. Throw three times and the greatest number wins."

Buffalo Bill placed the paper representing his share in the Gilt Edge Mine on the table, with the fifteen hundred won for him by the doctor, and putting the dice in the weird box, prepared to try his luck.

CHAPTER XLIX.

A TEST OF LUCK.

"LET US alternate the throws," said Doctor Dick, as Buffalo Bill held the grim box, about to throw the dice.

"As you please, doctor; but remember, I am lucky."

"So am I, and I'll chance my luck as a test against yours," was the reply.

Buffalo Bill shook the dice in the box threw, raised the tiny skull and said simply:

"Four sixes—twenty-four."

"It could not be better."

"Now look for the same."

"Four sixes," said Buffalo Bill as the doctor raised the skull.

"Even so far."

"Yes."

"Throw again."

Buffalo Bill did so and raising the box he said:

"Four fives—twenty and twenty-four are forty-four."

Again the doctor threw and this time was revealed as before, a tie.

"Remarkable," said Buffalo Bill with increasing interest, and he prepared to throw again.

Throwing, he continued.

"Two trays and deuces—ten, and to forty-four, fifty-four."

"You'll win, doctor."

Doctor Dick smiled and threw the dice.

"Two fours and two aces—ten," he said eagerly.

"A tie," was Buffalo Bill's remark, and he laughed.

But the doctor seemed most deeply interested in the test of luck, and said:

"Let us throw to break the tie."

"Well, shall I throw first again?"

"No, I will."

The doctor threw the dice again, hesitated before he raised the box and then did so quickly.

"Three sixes and a five," he said, adding:

"Can you beat it, Cody?"

"I'll tell you later," was the smiling response, and Buffalo Bill shook the diamond-studded gold dice in their grim box and threw.

He too raised the box slowly, for he was a poor man in those days, and what he had put into the Gilt Edge Mine for a third share had represented his savings for over a year.

If he won this time he still had his share, got back the fifteen hundred won from him the evening before, by Doctor Dick, and received three thousand besides, a nice little fortune indeed for the famous chief of scouts, who already had begun to figure on the fine little fortune he would have to put aside for a rainy day, and bad weather is a very frequent incident in a borderman's life.

He was perfectly cool, for he had as complete control of his nerves as a professional gambler, and could not but observe that the notedly cool Doctor Dick was a trifle nervous as he glanced to see his throwing.

"Four sixes," said Buffalo Bill with no show of excitement in his tone.

"Yes, I am beaten by one only."

"You are indeed lucky, Mr. Cody," and the gambler doctor laughed, though not as though he enjoyed it.

"See here, Doctor Dick?"

"Well?"

"Last night I happened to be of service to you, and I believe you put the job up to try and repay me in some way."

"Is that so, for if I thought so I'd call it off," and the scout spoke warmly.

"It is not so, and as to the service you but canceled the little affair at Landlord Larry's

mine, when I stepped in at the capture of your deserter, Reddy.

"No, Cody, the throwing of those dice was a square deal, an honest test of luck. You won by a spot—"

"A diamond."

"Yes, so it was a close call, and it is the first time the box and diamond-studded squares ever failed me, and I never keep anything that plays me false, while, as they brought you luck, please accept box and dice with my compliments."

"No, I cannot think of such a thing."

"Then I shall throw them in the creek, for, as I said, I never cling to anything that once fails me."

"Do you know, if I miss with a revolver I give it away, if a horse falls with me I never ride him again, if I lose in a game of cards I never play with the same pack again—in fact I am as superstitious as a negro, for if I see a rat in the morning I never make a bet that day, if I meet a cross-eyed man or one who is deformed, I cross myself to destroy the Hoodoo, always put my right sock and boot on first, never step across a grave, or walk around at the head of a corpse—in real earnestness I am a believer in signs, sounds and prognostications at all times; take the box as a souvenir of a fool, for I am one, yet with the best wishes of your humble servant, Doctor Dick."

After this remarkable dissertation of his superstition Doctor Dick handed the grim box and dice over to Buffalo Bill, adding:

"There is bad luck in it henceforth for me, good for you, take it."

"Thank you, I will, now you put it so strongly as you do, and I'll appreciate it and keep it as a souvenir of the most remarkable man I ever met, or expect to cross the trail of again,"* and Buffalo Bill held out his hand and grasped that of the Gold King.

The money won by the scout, and the strange souvenir were wrapped up, and taken to the hotel to be put in Landlord Larry's strong room until he left, and then Doctor Dick said:

"Now come over and see that I do not lose a bet to-night, Cody."

The scout accompanied the doctor to Larry's den, and it turned out just as he said, that he won every game, and there was not one present to bring forward the charge of cheating on account of his phenomenal luck.

CHAPTER L.

THE RETURN TRAIL.

APPEARING as though he intended remaining at Last Chance Mine for some days, Buffalo Bill decided to make a start for the fort with his prisoner.

He knew full well that there was a dangerous element in the mines, who, aware of the hour of his departure, and not dreading discovery, would ambush him on the trail, and free his prisoner, for they were always on the side against law, and for the criminal no matter what might be his crime.

So he told Landlord Larry that he would start after midnight on the return trail to Fort Faraway.

He also let Doctor Dick into the secret of the time of his departure, and spent the day in the mines, looking over the Gilt Edge Mine, which was owned by two officers and himself.

He had made all the discovery he could, about the holding up the coach, and killing of Bud Benton and the two passengers, and had gotten pretty well acquainted with the three elements of Last Chance, *viz.*, the good, bad and indifferent.

With Doctor Dick and Landlord Larry, the secret Vigilantes, and the support of the best of the miners on the side of order, he did not doubt that Last Chance would prosper.

His special mission had been a successful one, in that he had discovered, he believed, that the road-agents were not dwellers in Last Chance, he had seen that the camps were prospering, that a crack and cool-headed driver, Dave Dockery, drove the

* Buffalo Bill still has the remarkable souvenir, one of his most valued collection in his elegant prairie home of Scout's Rest Ranch, where it shares a place with the gifts of Queens, Emperors, Kings, Princes, famous men and dear friends.

stage on its semi-monthly run, and that a band of Vigilantes had been established under a man than whom there could be no better for a captain of such men

Then, too, Landlord Larry was an acknowledged leader and authority, acted as a judge, though by will of the people only, and then the scout had been successful in his mining ventures for himself and those he represented.

On his way he had found a deserted camp, and the grave of the desperado Black Heart Bill, not to speak of the fact that some white men had ventured down into the country of the grand Canyon of the Colorado, the wonderful *terra incognita* so religiously shunned by all.

Again, he had found out why Sergeant Wallace Weston had killed Sergeant Manton Mayhew, that it was an old feud between them, and that Black Heart Bill was the brother of Manton Weston, and also of Doctor Dick.

But this latter information, as to the identity of the three men he must keep to himself, as it had been confided to him in secrecy only by the Gold King.

There was another cause the scout had for congratulation, and that was in having captured the deserter, Roger Redfield and could take him back to the fort with him.

He had secured two horses from Landlord Larry, fine animals that would well stand the long trail, one for his prisoner to ride, the other for the outfit of bedding and provisions.

After a visit to the Den at night, Buffalo Bill said good-night and left the miners there all gambling.

He had already said good-by to Landlord Larry and Doctor Dick, and so parted with them with a nod.

Going to the hotel he told the clerk that he was ready to go, and he was handed over his money and the souvenir given him by Doctor Dick, along with the weapons belonging to Reddy.

The horses were then saddled, the outfit packed on the third animal, and the prisoner was led out and ordered to mount, as soon as Buffalo Bill had thrust a gag into his mouth and manacled his hands behind his back.

His feet were then connected with chained manacles beneath the horse, and with a word of farewell to the clerk, Buffalo Bill, holding the lines of his prisoner's horse, and the other animal, rode silently away in the darkness.

He had to go down the canyon into the valley, then along the stage trail for a couple of miles, when he branched off, making his own trail by knowledge of the country and the skill of his woodcraft.

After leaving the last cabin behind the scout halted and said:

"I have no wish to punish you, Redfield, but I had no desire to have you call for aid and cause me to take life in protecting you, so I gagged you as a means of safety, and to save your life, for I would have killed you before you should escape from me."

"Now I will free you of the gag and also unlock the manacles upon your hands, but those on your feet must remain."

He removed the gag as he spoke, then the wrist manacles, and mounting rode on, the prisoner not having spoken.

He was just about twenty miles from Last Chance, when, as the eastern sky was growing gray, he rode into a small canyon and went into camp.

He staked out the horses, after watering them, and spreading his blankets lay down by the side of his prisoner, who still maintained a dead silence.

After several hours' sleep he arose, built a fire and cooked breakfast for both, remarking naively:

"I suppose you have lost your tongue, Redfield, but your teeth are in good condition for a venison steak?"

"You bet they are."

"Ah! I thought you had been struck speechless, and that you were playing for a candidate for the deaf and dumb asylum."

"No, I can talk."

"All right try and make up your mind to help me all you can in the long trail before us, for we may have a brush with the Indians, and your scalp is as dear to you as mine, I guess."

"A man's life dear to him when he is under the shadow of the gallows," sneered the prisoner

"I do not know how to answer you, except to tell you that once at the hanging of two Irishmen, a bull broke out of a neighboring pasture and began to toss the people about, when one of the condemned men said to the other.

"Bedad, Pat, but it's a good thing for us we are after being up here, safe out of harum's way."

"Faith and it is that same, Mike," answered the other.

Roger Redfield laughed at the story, and Buffalo Bill went on to say:

"Now, pard, you know that, as an officer of the Government, I am only doing my duty in arresting you."

"I feel sorry for you, but yet I must do my duty and if you so will look at it we will get along all right."

"Trust me by taking my irons off and I'll do all you wish."

"No, I cannot do that, will not, so it is useless to ask it."

"How much is it worth to you, Bill Cody, to set me free?"

"The knowledge that I will have done my duty in taking you to camp."

"To be hanged."

"You should have thought of the consequences before you took life, deserted and stole from your brother soldiers."

"But it is no use to discuss your deeds, so let us get along peacefully."

CHAPTER LI.

CAUGHT IN A DEADLY PLOT.

ROGER REDFIELD was silent again for some moments, after what Buffalo Bill said, and went on eating his breakfast.

At last, as though he had made up his mind as to what he would do, he got up and aided the scout in washing up the dishes and setting things to right for the start.

The chain connecting his feet was eighteen inches in length, so that he could move about readily.

When they mounted again, Buffalo Bill once more made the manacles fast under the horse, and led the way as before.

They pushed on until near sunset, when, coming to a good place to camp, Buffalo Bill said:

"Well, Redfield, we have made about fifty miles our first day out, so we will camp here by this stream, for we could not get a better place, and I know of no other near."

"You are a good trailer, Buffalo Bill."

"What makes you think so?"

"I have been watching you, and you have been going as the crow flies, except to turn out where we could not pass."

"I wish to strike the old Mormon trail up into the country where the fort is located, where I am taking you."

"Where is that?"

"To Fort Faraway."

"Why do you take me there?"

"It is a new military post, and your regiment is there, or rather a part of it, under your commander."

"That is where you are stationed?"

"Yes."

"I suppose they will hang me?"

"They will try you first; but do not let us talk of that. We'll wait until the time comes, then worry—don't cross a bridge before you get to it, is my motto, Redfield."

"Let me settle one thing with you."

"Go ahead."

"I'll feel better then."

"All right. What is it?"

"You are a poor man."

"Am I?" and the scout recalled that he was considerably better off than when he had gone to Last Chance.

"Are you not?"

"I am not a millionaire by any means, or the photograph of one, Reddy."

"Well, I am."

"You?"

"Yes; I myself!"

"In your mind."

"No, in reality."

"What, when you were workin for about five dollars a day when I lit down upon you?"

"Still I am a millionaire."

"I can't be the judge, for I have no millionaires as intimate every-day friends."

"Well, I have got a mine that will make us both rich."

"Where is it?"

"I will take you to it, if you will promise, when I show you my find, that you will let me go, saying that I escaped from you when you were asleep."

"And more, I will share it with you squarely."

"See here, Reddy, if you really had such a mine, you could not tempt me to go back on my duty, and let me tell you now, when you escape from me it will be when I am asleep, yes, the sleep of death, so just dismiss that idea from your mind."

The prisoner sighed, but at once threw off his look of melancholy, and said:

"All right, you have missed it; but I'll be no trouble to you now, Bill, and help all I can."

"I'll make the coffee."

"No, I am too good a cook to let you do that, and I am not proud."

"You unsaddle the horses and stake them out, but don't range out of reach of my rifle, or you will hear it calling you back to supper."

"You are afraid I would put poison in the coffee."

"I believe that is just what you intended to do, for with my toes turned up, what a picnic you would have—by Jupiter! but I will search you."

The man attempted to resist, but the revolver of Buffalo Bill, looked him squarely in the eyes.

"Hands up!"

The command was sternly uttered and promptly obeyed.

Instantly the manacles were put on the wrists and mounting his horse Buffalo Bill ran a lariat through them, tossed it over the limb of a tree and drew the man upward until his toes only touched the ground.

Then he proceeded deliberately to search him.

In an inner pocket in one bootleg he found a small parcel wrapped in rubber cloth.

Opening it he took out a paper enveloped in tin-foil, and upon the back of this was printed:

DEADLY POISON.

"Well, Redfield, that was a lucky escape for me; but I'll make a thorough search while I am about it," and the scout did not desist in searching the prisoner until he was convinced that he had nothing else concealed.

The search resulted in the finding of a small dirk-knife, also in his boot, a derringer, a roll of money amounting to over a thousand dollars, several hundred in gold in a buck-skin bag, some letters in an old leather wallet and his pipe.

"I'll keep them, Redfield, and turn them over to the commandant," said Buffalo Bill, and he added:

"Now, sir, unsaddle those horses and stake them out to feed, but beware and do not go out of my sight, for I am not in the best of humor with you."

The prisoner muttered an invective but obeyed, and returning to the camp-fire soon after sat down and moodily watched the scout prepare supper for both of them.

CHAPTER LII.

AN AMBUSH.

BUFFALO BILL was angry, as he had reason to be, but he prepared supper and helping his prisoner bountifully said:

"There is no need to be in a bad humor, Reddy, so we'll forget what happened, and I know you will not blame me for watching you as I would a snake."

"Come, eat your supper and enjoy it."

Reddy, however, had the blues. He had been thwarted in his plot to kill, and was now defenseless, so could not shake off readily his sore disappointment.

He ate his supper in silence, smoked his pipe and turned in.

Then Buffalo Bill tied the lariat to his manacles so that he could not easily escape, and went to have a look at the horses.

He changed them to another grazing-ground, after watering them, staked them

out securely, and returning to his camp found that had he not gotten back when he did his prisoner would have freed himself of the lasso, and gotten away in the darkness.

It would have been hard work for him, chained as he was; but had he gotten hold of his weapons he could have shot the scout as he came back, or in the night when he was asleep by his side.

"You will have it so, Redfield, that I must treat you severely, so do not blame me."

"Do not iron me, and I'll do no more toward escaping," pleaded the man piteously.

"All right, your feet are ironed, and it's man to man, so I'll not be hard upon you; but remember, like the great Napoleon, I sleep with one eye open," and Buffalo Bill laid down by his prisoner.

He pretended to go to sleep, yet did not. He felt the man whose back was toward him, slowly move a few inches.

Then he laid still, to move again after five minutes.

This was kept up until he stretched out one hand and moved it about.

The scout lay perfectly still.

Whatever the movement meant the prisoner than shoved back into his former position and said sleepily:

"I am tired of lying upon my right side—will you turn over?"

Buffalo Bill did so in a half-asleep manner.

Then the prisoner turned and was quiet.

For a few moments Buffalo Bill remained as still as death, but suddenly, with a quick turn he confronted the prisoner, grasped his right hand, and dragged from it a rock as large as a brick.

"Oh, curse you, Buffalo Bill!" groaned the prisoner.

"Because I don't wish to have you crush my head in with that stone?"

"Now I know you, Roger Redfield, and I shall show you no mercy from now on, as far as your comfort goes."

"Hold out your hands!"

"I will not."

"If you do not I shall tie you to that tree all night."

The prisoner obeyed sullenly.

The hands were manacled, and the lariat bound them to the chain on the feet.

"Now, Redfield, get to sleep, for you will need it, as we have a long ride to-morrow to reach the Mormon Trail, where I shall camp."

Redfield uttered a vicious oath, but the scout did not reply and sunk to sleep, though he had been so trained in his long life upon the border, that he would awake at the slightest sound or movement.

Finding himself outwitted the prisoner also went to sleep, though in a mood that betokened wicked dreams.

After a refreshing sleep Buffalo Bill awoke at daybreak, built a fire, cooked breakfast and packed away the things without asking the aid of the prisoner, who sat by and moped, though he did not neglect to eat his breakfast.

Mounting they rode on, the prisoner's hands being again mercifully released from the irons, though his feet were kept chained together.

A halt of an hour was made at noon, and again the trail was taken for the night camp.

The sun was an hour high when the scout and his prisoner turned into the old Mormon Trail running up into Utah from New Mexico, and by the way of Lee's Ferry across the Colorado Grande.

Going along this for several miles, and in a country somewhat known to him, Buffalo Bill made for a large spring up in a swale between two large hills.

He knew that there was good grass there, the purest of water, plenty of wood, and it was a camp which could only be approached from the front, down the canyon, as the high sides were precipitous, and the canyon ended against a lofty cliff.

"We can make our camp in the center of the canyon, Reddy, and turn the horses loose above us, so they cannot stray by."

"I camped here on my way to Last Chance," said the scout.

"I wish you had died here," growled the prisoner.

"But I didn't," was the smiling reply.

But just as the words left the lips of the scout there came several rifle-shots from among the rocks on one side, and down went the horse ridden by Buffalo Bill, and the pack-animal also, while the one ridden by the prisoner pulled back hard to free himself from the lasso which held him to Cody's saddle.

CHAPTER LIII.

A CLOSE CALL.

So unexpected was the volley from among the bowlders on the side of the hill, near the mouth of the canyon, when Buffalo Bill was guiding the way to a night camp, that the scout was caught completely off his guard.

He knew that he was in a country where Indians seldom, if ever penetrate, from their dread of the "Evil Spirits' Hunting Grounds," as they called the Grand Canyon of the Colorado, and white men, not even his scouts, dared to venture there.

Unlooking for an attack, his horse fell dead before he could extricate himself from the saddle, and tangled in the lead line of the pack-horse, his leg was caught under the animal he rode and pinned there.

At the same time the pack-horse reared and fell, being mortally wounded, and very nearly crushed him beneath his weight.

But, taken at a disadvantage as was the scout, his presence of mind did not desert him.

He sought to prevent the running off of his prisoner, whose horse was not hurt, and at the same time defend himself as best he could.

Drawing his revolver he called out:

"Reddy, I'll kill you if you make your horse break loose."

This quieted the efforts of the prisoner to escape, for he had at once urged his horse to break away from the lariat, and was trying to free it from about his neck.

But the eyes of the prostrate scout then turned upon his foes, and he beheld several men moving toward him down the hill, and with their rifles in hand.

One of these he recognized, and at once his revolver cracked.

Down went the man, rolling over dead, the bullet having pierced his brain, while the others sprung for cover, and a voice shouted:

"We've got you foul, Buffalo Bill, so hands up or we will kill you."

"Surrender and we'll spare your life, for it's your prisoner and yer boddle we is after."

"I know you, Headlight Joe, and if you want my prisoner and my money come and rob me," was the bold reply of Buffalo Bill, and a bullet from his revolver struck the top of the rock just where Headlight Joe had peered over an instant before.

The shot was answered by several rifles, the bullets cutting so near to the scout that he felt that they did not much care whether they killed him or not, while one whirling by Redfield's head caused him to call out:

"For God's sake, Joe, don't fire again or you will kill me."

What the result would have been the scout could not guess, though he was slowly working his leg out from beneath his horse, when suddenly down the valley, came the ringing notes of a bugle.

The effect was electrical, for Buffalo Bill uttered his wild, terrible war-cry, while shouts of alarm were heard from Headlight Joe and his companions, who started at full speed up the hill, to seek a spot where cavalry could not follow them.

"Great God! we will have to leave our horses!" shouted Headlight Joe, as he bounded forward, Sam Sully running near him.

Then, from afar off among the pinon trees came a puff of smoke, and Sam Sully staggered, fell, rose, and falling to his knees, cried piteously:

"Don't leave me, Joe!"

But in vain the appeal, for Headlight Joe's terror was great, the shot that brought down Sam Sully added wings to his feet, for Breakneck lay down the hill dead, from a bullet from Buffalo Bill's revolver.

With a loud, wild cry Sam Sully fell forward and lay motionless, and the scout opened a rapid fire, while several shots came from among the pinons, and once more following them, rung out the bugle-notes.

Then came the loud command:

"Come, men, come! or they will escape!" There was the clatter of hoofs now and out from the *pinons* dashed a horseman, rifle in hand.

He charged by Buffalo Bill like the wind and bounded on up the hill, sending his bullets flying ahead of him.

But, Headlight Joe, with his two companions, had reached the top of the ridge now, clambering up rocks a horse could not go over, and then running like frightened coyotes down the range on the other side, hunting for the heavy timber.

A wild war-cry came from the lips of the horseman, as he sprung from his saddle, and climbing up to the top of the range, rattled out half a dozen shots from his repeating rifle, after the fugitives who were frightened half out of their wits.

Again, from the top of the ridge he gave the bugle-notes, commanding a charge, and vigor was added to the panting, flying men, who supposed a troop of cavalry was in pursuit.

Gaining the shelter of the timber the three men slackened their speed a little, for their tongues were protruding from between their teeth, their eyes were sunken and they could not stand that killing pace much longer.

Coming upon a small stream they halted, thrust their heads deep into the water, filled their canteens and sped on, Headlight Joe at last finding breath to say:

"Thank Heaven, we've got our provisions, canteens and weapons with us, and night coming on soon, we can escape."

CHAPTER LIV.

THE MYSTERIOUS RESCUER.

SEATED upon his horse, held by a lariat to Buffalo Bill's saddle, his feet chained beneath the animal, Redfield the prisoner had been an excited observer of all that had happened.

He saw Buffalo Bill bring down Break-neck with a deadly shot, he heard the bugle-call, saw the shot drop Sam Sully to his knees, heard his piteous cry not to be deserted, saw him fall upon his face, and beheld a single horseman dash out from among the *pinons*.

The prisoner then gave up all hope, for he knew that Headlight Joe and his companions would never stop running as long as they could hold up the pace, which would have been a winner in a foot-race across country.

Then the eye of the prisoner turned toward the single horseman and saw him fly by and on up the hill.

He beheld him leap from his saddle and continue on foot; heard his shots and the bugle-call, and then watched him coming back.

Buffalo Bill meanwhile had been striving hard to extricate his leg, and at last being successful, rose to his feet with the remark:

"A close call that, Reddy, but I am still alive, and you did not get away."

"Satan is your patron saint, Buffalo Bill."

"Thanks; but, where are the troopers, and who is that horseman?"

"There are no troopers, for I saw that man place his hands to his lips and imitate the bugle-call."

"He's a dandy, then; but I guess you are right, for no troopers have come in sight, and here he comes alone."

The man came forward at an easy canter, and as he rode up, said politely:

"Pardon my not stopping to help you, sir, as I went by; but I had started those fellows running, and wished to encourage them to keep it up."

"I think you did help me, sir, and to the extent of saving my life, for those devils meant to kill me, to settle a score they had charged to me."

"But have we not met before?" and Buffalo Bill gazed fixedly at the man before him.

He was a man of fine physique, though he stooped in the shoulders, wore his dark hair and beard long, and spectacles shaded his eyes.

He had a slouch hat, the rim of which hung down over his ears, and his general appearance was that of one who had been a long time away from civilization.

His horse was a good one, but rough-hided, and his saddle and weapons were weather worn.

"My name is Andrew Seldon, sir. I may call myself The Hermit of the Grand Canyon, for I make my home in the wilderness—in fact, I am a prospector, so now you know all there is to tell you of myself."

"May I ask your name, please?"

"I am better known on the border by the name of Buffalo Bill than by that which I own to as William Cody."

"Indeed! you are the famous scout and Indian-fighter, Buffalo Bill, of whom I have often heard."

"I am glad to have served you, sir, indeed I am."

"With your cavalry," said Buffalo Bill, with a smile.

"I am an imitator, sir, and can mimic a bugle-call fairly well—at least it served the purpose on this occasion."

"Just as well as a troop of cavalry would have done."

"Do you think these fellows have stopped running yet?" and the scout laughed.

"Hardly; but your comrade I now note is a prisoner?"

"Yes, a deserter from the army, whom I captured in Last Chance Mining-Camp, and am taking to Fort Faraway with me."

"Those men were from Last Chance also, and were driven out of there by Doctor Dick, a noted character of the mines, and I had a hand in helping him."

"They knew I had this prisoner, so came to the Mormon Trail, feeling certain I would camp here and they would then rescue him."

"But for you, sir, they would have done so."

"Yes, I saw them from a distance, and not liking their looks went into hiding."

"I saw you pass, and, as soon as I could, followed, fearing an ambush for you."

"And how to show my gratitude I do not know."

"By not mentioning it."

"Do you hunt about here?"

"No, I am on my way to Wingate to purchase supplies to last me through the winter."

"And you expect to winter over on the canyon?"

"Oh yes."

"Alone?"

"No, I have a companion with me, and if we get rich you may hear of us again; but now I must be off, for I wish to get back as soon as possible."

"You surely will camp with me to-night?"

"Thank you, but I must decline, for I cannot lose a day, and I have a long ride before me, as you must know, and as I expect to lead a couple of pack-horses back I will have to travel slow."

"But you must camp somewhere?"

"Not until after midnight; therefore I'll say good-by, and will ask you to kindly bury that man I had to lay out."

"Certainly I will; but, why not go with me to Fort Faraway, since it is nearer for you."

"A rougher trail though; and I have acquaintances at Wingate."

"And may have at Faraway."

"No, I have no friends at Faraway I am sure."

"Well, Mr. Seldon, I am sorry to see you leave me, but I hope to meet you again some time, for I have an idea of scouting along the rim of the Grand Canyon some day."

"Then we may meet again, but now I must go."

"One moment please," earnestly said the scout.

"Yes."

"I wish to ask you an important question, one you may answer or not, as you please. But, come one side, for I do not care to have that fellow hear me," and Buffalo Bill led the way to a spot some paces distant.

CHAPTER LV.

THE CAMP IN THE CANYON.

"I WISH to say," and Buffalo Bill spoke impressively, "that on my way to Last Chance mines, I scouted down to the vicinity of the Grand Canyon, and at a point some forty or fifty miles from here came upon a deserted camp."

"Yes," and the man did not change color.

"The camp had been deserted some months, and I judged, by what I saw, that three men had camped there, as many horses and a dog."

"Yes."

"Not far from the camp, on the bank of a stream, just at the base of a large quaking aspen tree, was a grave."

"Yes."

"Cut into the tree was an inscription, having a name, that of Hugh Mayhew, alias Black Heart Bill."

"Yes."

The stranger still answered only with the affirmative, his countenance not changing in the least.

"Now, Mr. Seldon, what I wish to ask you is, if you know anything about that camp?"

"I do," decidedly.

"And the grave?"

"I dug it."

"And the man?"

"Black Heart Bill?"

"Yes."

"I killed him."

"You did?" in astonishment.

"I did," with decision.

There was not the first sign of emotion, or of triumph in the man's reply.

"Why did you kill him, may I ask?"

"He wronged me cruelly, as the lines in the tree state, and he was about to kill a comrade to whom he owed his life."

"I was fortunate to be on hand to rescue him, his comrade, as I was in your case, and in a fair fight with Black Heart Bill I killed him."

"Then I buried him, and his comrade is now mine, the one I speak of who anxiously awaits my return."

"We went on our way and left him in his grave."

"That is all I have to tell, or care to, Mr. Cody, for such I believe you said your name is, besides Buffalo Bill?"

"Yes, and I thank you, sir, for your explanation clears up a mystery of that deserted camp, and which I am glad to fathom."

"As you seem determined to go on, Mr. Seldon, I will not detain you; but is there nothing I can do for you, as I am well supplied with provisions, ammunition, yes, and horses, for those fellows left their animals up the canyon, thus cutting themselves off from them in their flight."

"There is nothing that you can do for me, thank you, Mr. Cody—good-by; but, as I said, some day we may meet again."

He grasped the scout's hand, and after riding off a few paces halted and called back:

"Be careful not to trust your prisoner, for he has as evil a countenance as I ever saw."

"Thanks for the warning; but you read him aright, for he has already shown what he is capable of," and the scout waved his hand, while he mused to himself:

"Somewhere I have met that man before, or some one strangely like him."

"Who is it that he reminds me of and whom I cannot recall?"

"Well, I'll give it up now, for there is work to be done."

Convinced that the three men had stampeded for good, and would not dare return, Buffalo Bill took the saddle and bridle off his dead horse and the pack also.

"Here, Reddy, I'll unchain you, so I can make your horse carry the pack up into the canyon, and you lead him there, while I bring my traps."

In a few minutes they started, and in a secluded break among the rocks, near the spring, Buffalo Bill made his camp.

Telling his prisoner to gather wood, and knowing he could not escape with his manacles on, the scout took two of the horses belonging to Headlight Joe and his men, back to where the bodies of Sam Sully and Break-neck lay.

Blindfolding the animals,* the scout placed the bodies across them and led them back to camp.

"What did yer bring those stiffs here for, to haunt us all night?" said Redfield, sullenly.

"I do not care to leave them where they

* Horses are always afraid of a dead body. Many have to be led blindfolded before they will carry large game.

—THE AUTHOR.

fell, to be devoured by coyotes, even though they did attempt my life."

"You are mighty merciful toward the dead."

"Yes, they cannot care for themselves."

"Can I have what they has got on 'em?"

"No, you will not need it," was the suggestive response, and Redfield kept quiet.

Buffalo Bill then led the horses up to good grazing, the prisoner's horse as well, brought back an armful of wood, and soon had a cheerful fire burning.

The traps of the fugitive miners, that is their saddles, bridles, and the things on the pack-saddle, he brought to his camp, remarking as he did so:

"Well, Reddy, we lost two horses, but got six in return, though I would not have given my old comrade for all of them, as we have been on many a trail together."

"What are you looking at?"

"I thought I saw Breakneck move."

"Nonsense, for my bullet went through his head."

"You are nervous, that is all, because night is coming on."

"Come, stir about and help get supper, for I wish to scout around afterwards, to see if those fellows do take it into their heads to come back, though I do not think they will."

"If they don't they'll starve."

"Oh, no, they had their haversacks with them, and their weapons, and the walking is good, while if they do come back they are liable to run against a bullet."

"They are three to one."

"That is why I intend to fight them Indian style, if they do come," came the reply.

CHAPTER LVI.

OVERTAKEN.

BUFFALO BILL prepared a very substantial supper for his prisoner and himself, for he had shot an antelope during the afternoon and secured some fine steaks from it.

He ate with evident relish, seemingly entirely oblivious of his almost fatal adventure of the evening, and that even then his three foes might be slipping up on him.

Having finished supper he got out the iron handcuffs, and ran them through the stirrup on his heavy saddle, and then fastened them upon his prisoner, doing the same with the chain on his feet, and tying a lariat around both.

"I guess you cannot get far away before I return," he explained to the prisoner, who bitterly cursed him.

Then, gathering up some of the wood he had gathered, and taking his rifle, the scout slipped out of camp.

Going cautiously up the ridge, just near the top, he built five little piles of wood, and going quickly from one to the other set them on fire.

At the same time he went some distance off in the darkness and challenged loudly, and with military ring:

"Halt!"

"Who comes there?"

There came no answer, but he heard a cracking sound, as though some one trod on a dead stick, and instantly he fired down toward the timber, while loud rung these words:

"Corporal of the guard! Post number Five!"

Going quickly to another point he also fired and repeated the words, changing only to "Post Number Three!"

Then he lay back against a rock and laughed, for he distinctly heard the sound of running feet through the timber!

"Just in time, for they were coming the sneak act, to try and steal cavalry horses, as they thought.

"But finding the sentinels on watch, seeing half a dozen fires and convinced now that they will have no time to lose, if they wish to get well away in the darkness, they will not return but make tracks with all speed.

"It seems to me I could see that eye of Headlight Joe gleam in the firelight!"

"My stars! but, how they made that time through these dark woods I do not know!" and the scout seemed to enjoy his ruse that had stampeded the enemy, who now gave up all hope of cutting out any cavalry horses.

Returning to his camp Buffalo Bill stampeded out of the mouth of the canyon a pack of half-famished coyotes, that were attracted by the scent of the dead bodies, and hoping that the fugitive desperadoes would hear his shots, he fired half a dozen after the brutes.

"Well, who have you been killing?" sneered the prisoner, as the scout walked into camp.

"Coyotes."

"Who did you hail?"

"Your rescuing party, for they were sneaking up to steal a cavalry horse; but they'll not come again."

"Are they dead?"

"Not unless they died of fright or run themselves to death."

"I wish you'd remove those dead bodies out of my sight."

"They are harmless, and I wish to have them where I can see that the coyotes do not disturb them."

"I'll cover them over, however."

With this Buffalo Bill spread a blanket over the two dead men, and then set about making the bed for his prisoner and himself.

This done, he scattered the firebrands so they would die out, and releasing Redfield from the saddles, told him to turn in.

The man did so in silence and the scout lay down by his side and was soon fast asleep.

He awoke before dawn, took a short scout around, found all quiet, and building up the fire set to work cooking breakfast, the prisoner lending him no help whatever.

When breakfast was over he gathered up his captured horses, which, with his own pack-animal, made seven in number, and began to prepare to continue on the trail to the fort.

He divided the packs so that the horses could travel light, and then set to work to dig a grave for the dead outlaws.

This was no easy task, but it was at last accomplished, the bodies were searched for what they might have of value on them, and the scout said:

"See, Reddy, this goes to the Soldiers' Aid Fund, and it amounts to considerable, as you see," and he held up the bags of gold the two men had on them.

Their weapons were packed then, the horses saddled, the prisoner mounted, and Buffalo Bill was preparing to spring into his saddle, when out of the pinons rode a horseman, and as he saw the scout, he gave a loud cry and came on at a gallop.

"As I live, it is Doctor Dick!"

"He has overtaken us," cried Buffalo Bill.

CHAPTER LVII.

A REQUEST GRANTED.

THAT Buffalo Bill was surprised at the appearance of Doctor Dick, there was no denying.

What had caused him to come? was his first thought.

Something must have surely gone wrong at Last Chance Claim.

Perhaps Dave Dockery had been held up and killed.

But, the scout could only surmise, while the Gold King came toward him at a canter.

He was dressed in the same style that was his wont, gorgeous in the extreme, and with his gold buttons and diamonds on.

His horse was the same splendid animal Buffalo Bill had seen him dash along on in the camps at Last Chance Claim.

At sight of him the prisoner turned very white, and his lips quivered as he asked:

"What brings him here, curse him?"

"His horse, Reddy."

"Yes, try your wit now; but, it's no joking matter for me."

"Guilty conscience, Reddy, for you think he is after you, to take you back with him for the Vigilantes to hang; but, I do not think that is it."

"What do you think he comes for?"

"I'll not guess, but wait and see."

A moment more and Doctor Dick threw himself from his saddle, grasped Buffalo Bill's hand and said:

"Cody, old fellow, I am glad to see you alive, for do you know, Landlord Larry and

I were talking it over, and we came to the conclusion that Headlight Joe and his gang would try and head you off, rescue Reddy, and kill you."

"You guessed well, doctor, for see, there are their horses."

"They did head you off then?"

"Yes, shot my horse and the pack-animal down from ambush, and, but for the arrival of a gallant rescuer, would have gotten the best of me."

"Who is he?"

"He told me he was Andrew Seldon, and also that he was the Hermit of the Grand Canyon."

"The mischief you say! I did not know any one dwelt there?"

"Nor did I; but he does, and he has a comrade with him."

"He was on his way to Wingate to buy stores, and would not even camp the night with me; but seeing the gang going into ambush he went into hiding, and when I came along and got into it over my depth, he came to the rescue like a regiment of cavalry.

"But now, tell me what fetches you here, doctor?"

"I came to aid you, if I was needed, but got here too late, it seems."

"Well, you are always doing some one a service, Doctor Dick, and I thank you for your kind act in my behalf."

"Now you are here you must go on to Fort Faraway, with me."

"Couldn't think of it, Cody, for I came off in a hurry."

"You see, I followed the trail of those reptiles, and saw they branched off from the stage road and headed on a course that would take them across your path, and ahead of you, so I pushed on as fast as I could, and holding on before dawn lost their trail and stumbled upon yours; therefore, here I am."

"And right glad am I to see you; but, why not go to Faraway with me?"

"Not this time; but what of your prisoner?"

"He is all right."

"Has he given you any trouble?"

"No more than he was able to do, for he has tried to poison me, brain me and get away from me, while he curses me systematically every hour in the day, yes, and wakes me up at night with his snarls and growls; but I don't mind that and it amuses him."

"Why did you not put a bullet through him?" demanded the doctor.

"Oh, I would not do that unless driven to it."

"But come, we'll camp here until after dinner, and then push on."

"Yes, we'll camp here for dinner, for I have a favor to ask of you, Cody."

"Granted in advance of knowing what it is, if in my power to do it, Doc."

"Just like you, and I guess you can do it."

"Name it."

"Come here with me," and the Gold King led the way some paces apart from the scowling prisoner.

"You told me that, when on your way to Last Chance, you came upon a deserted camp."

"Yes."

"And a grave?"

"True."

"Down toward the Grand Canyon?"

"Yes."

"It cannot be very far from here?"

"Less than fifty miles."

"Now, Cody, I wish to go there and see if my brother really lies in that grave."

"You could not tell now."

"Yes I could, from two things. He broke his arm when a boy just above the elbow, his left arm, and that would show, while he also was severely frost-bitten when a little fellow, and three of the toes from his left foot had to be amputated. These marks would be proof positive, I think."

"Beyond all doubt."

"So I ask you to go with me to the grave, and let me see if it is really poor Hugh or not, for it might be that it is some one supposed to be my unfortunate brother."

"I will go with you, doctor, for it will detain me not longer than two days at the most," decided Buffalo Bill, promptly.

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE PROOF.

HAVING decided not to start until after dinner, the horses were staked out again, and the animal ridden by Doctor Dick really needed rest, after his long and rapid ride to overtake the scout.

The two friends, feeling that the prisoner, with his hoppled feet, could not leave the canyon, walked about together talking over matters, until Buffalo Bill said it was time to get dinner.

They gathered some wood, replenished the fire, and soon had dinner on, the prisoner refusing to aid, and watching them in his malignant way.

But he was ready to eat when the meal was ready, and more than was his share, the scout always helping him most liberally.

When the dinner was cleared away, the tin plates, cups and frying-pan washed, the horses were brought up and saddled, the prisoner mounted and the party started off.

The prisoner was made to lead two of the pack-horses, while Buffalo Bill mounted upon the animal that had been his own pack-horse, led two and Doctor Dick the others belonging to the Headlight Joe gang.

Down the valley they went, Buffalo Bill leading the way, and though he could have followed the trail left by the Hermit of the Grand Canyon, he took good care to keep clear of it, for he did not wish Doctor Dick to observe it.

They camped early that night, when they found water and grass, and the next day at noon came in sight of the deserted camp which Buffalo Bill had before visited.

There stood the wicky-up, as it had been left, and the Gold King saw the trace of the camp as they approached it.

He instinctively picked out the large quaking aspen tree, at the foot of which was the grave, and then dashed on.

Dismounting at the grave he stood gazing down upon it, while Buffalo Bill took the prisoner some distance off and left him to gather wood for a fire, while he staked out the horses.

When he returned the prisoner was serenely seated where he had left him, and had not gathered a stick of wood.

"Reddy, you would make a preacher swear," said Buffalo Bill smiling, for he would not give the man the satisfaction of knowing that he annoyed him.

"How?"

"Oh, just on principle; but you wish some supper, do you not?"

"Yes."

"Then get some wood."

"I don't have to, and I like to be waited on."

The scout said nothing, but Doctor Dick just then approached and overheard the remark.

Instantly came the words:

"See here, Reddy, I shall be with this outfit for a couple of days, and not a swallow of water or morsel of food shall pass your lips unless you do your share."

"Now, which shall it be, work or starve?"

"Work," was the brisk response, and the prisoner began to gather wood.

"You are too kind to him, Cody, and he knows you will not treat him harshly."

"I can't, for it is like abusing a dying man, for he is sure to hang when I get him to the fort and he is tried."

"He ought to hang, for he is as bad as they make them; but I have opened the grave."

"With what result?"

"He was decently buried, and, what is more, a ring was left on his finger which I recognize, while the three toes are missing from his left foot."

"Then there is no mistake as to its being your brother?"

"None whatever."

"Here is the ring, and I will soon have the grave filled in."

"I will help you, now that Reddy has taken to work."

They walked together to the grave, and Buffalo Bill said:

"I am glad your mind is at rest, as far as your knowing the truth is concerned."

"Yes, it is better."

"And you still hold to the belief that your brother was killed by Sergeant Wallace Weston?"

"More than ever, now, I believe it."

"Why so?"

"He was a skillful carver in wood, and I remember cut his own and our names in the beech trees near our homes, and those letters, in the name, Hugh Mayhew, are an exact counterpart of those of the long ago, for they have the same peculiar form to them."

"You seem convinced, Doctor Dick, yet you are wrong, for let me tell you that I know who killed your brother."

"You know?" and the doctor grasped scout's arm with a grip of iron.

CHAPTER LIX.

THE SCOUT'S PLAN.

DOCTOR DICK was impressed painfully, by the words of the fort scout, and said earnestly:

"Tell me what you mean, Cody, for surely you did not kill my brother?"

"I? Oh, no; but, as I said, I know who did."

"Tell me who he was, and even if not Wallace Weston, I will hunt him to his grave."

"Don't say that, doctor, for you do not know how your brother may have wronged him, what he may have done to deserve death at his slayer's hand."

"Who was the man, Cody?"

"You remember that I told you I was rescued by a mysterious man?"

"Yes, one calling himself the Hermit of the Grand Canyon, I think you said, though I paid little attention to him then, as I was interested in finding you safe."

"Yes, he was called the Hermit of Grand Canyon, or rather called himself so."

"Well, when he spoke of living on the canyon or near it, I at once connected him with the camp and the grave."

"Yes, yes," eagerly.

"I asked him about the camp."

"And he knew of it?"

"He did."

"And the grave?"

"He knew of that, too."

"Tell me all that he said, Cody," urgently.

"Well, he said it had been his camp; that he had found there a man who had cruelly wronged him, and that he was even then going to kill his comrade."

"And did?"

"No, the Hermit said that he fought a fair fight with him, killed him, dug his grave and cut that name upon this tree."

"But, who was this Hermit?"

"He said that his name was Seldon, as I thought that I mentioned to you."

"If you did it escaped me. Seldon, Seldon—I knew a Seldon once—Andrew Seldon."

"Why, that was the name he gave me."

"My God! can this be he? Describe him!"

"A well-formed man, but with a stoop in his shoulders, long dark hair and beard, and wearing glasses."

"Seldon was a well-formed man, as large as I am, had dark hair and beard and wore glasses."

"If it was Andrew Seldon he was once my friend, but we drifted apart, and I afterward heard that he had killed a man in a duel, which forced him to leave his native state of Tennessee."

"Yes, and it was reported that he came West to the gold mines to try and make a fortune, for the trial swamped him, it was said, and the feeling of the people was so bitter against him, for some reason, that he left."

"That must be the man, for he struck me as one who would not bury himself in these wilds, unless it was as a fugitive from justice, or some other reason that made him shun his fellow-men," Buffalo Bill declared.

"Well, if it was Andrew Seldon that took my brother's life, he had cause, I am sure, given him by Hugh, whom he also knew, and there are circumstances connected with him that would induce me to take back my oath to hunt down the slayer of Hugh Mayhew."

"Then you are now convinced that Wallace Weston is dead, and that it was not he who killed your brother?"

"I ought to be; and yet, I will hardly feel at rest on that point until—"

"Until what?" asked Buffalo Bill, as Doctor Dick paused.

"Until I find Andrew Seldon and meet

him face to face, and know that it was he who took Hugh's life, and why he did so, bad as my brother was."

"Well, we can find Seldon, I think."

"How, and where?"

"I'll tell you what I will do for you, Doctor Dick."

"Yes, Cody?"

"I must take my prisoner on to the fort."

"Certainly."

"And can you not go with me?"

"I cannot."

"Well, you return to Last Chance and fit out for a rough trip of a month or more, until snow flies, for it will not do to be caught in the Grand Canyon country after winter sets in."

"By no means."

"Come with a pack-horse well supplied with bedding, food and ammunition."

"I will."

"And I will also fit out well, and meet you here, in, say ten days to two weeks, the first to arrive to wait for the other."

"I'll be here, Cody; and then?"

"We will hunt up Andrew Seldon."

"It's a bargain!" was the emphatic reply.

CHAPTER LX.

AT THE RENDEZVOUS.

WITH some definite plan in view, to find out the truth, as to who killed Hugh Mayhew, Doctor Dick seemed satisfied, even if it proved to be his old friend, Andrew Seldon.

They did not discuss the matter further, but went to their supper, which Redfield had been energetically preparing, and, as he had no means of poisoning them, they did not fear to partake of what he had cooked.

They passed an undisturbed night, and the next morning made an early start, the doctor going on his way back to Last Chance, and carrying with him one of the horses of the Headlight Joe outfit, which Buffalo Bill insisted upon taking along to rest his own animal and divide weights.

The scout and his prisoner then pushed on for Fort Faraway, for Buffalo Bill was anxious to reach there the following night.

To do this he did not spare the horses, but greatly to his disappointment Reddy's beast gave out; in fact, seemed so used up and lame that he could not go further.

What should be done? To delay there even for a few hours' rest would prevent him from reaching the fort next day.

Reddy was not sorry, of course; the deserter was only anxious not to ever see the fort again; so, when the horse gave out, his busy brain began to conceive some plan of escape.

But Buffalo Bill did not long hesitate. He would leave his prisoner and ride on for the fort; then send a detachment back for the prisoner.

Reddy was thereupon made to dismount. The poor lame beast was led aside and a pistol-shot soon told the deserter that he was to be left alone in that lonely wilderness.

"Why did you kill the brute?" asked the prisoner.

"To prevent you from getting on him and riding away," was Buffalo Bill's explanation.

"I propose to leave you here. You'll be safe enough with leg and wrist irons on, I guess. I'll go on to the fort and send a squad back after you. The coyotes won't bother you, for they'll have the horse to eat; but, as we haven't seen any for a whole day, I guess you'll not be disturbed by them."

Protest was of no use; so Reddy was left with a canteen of water and grub enough for a two days' supply. He was not lariated to a tree or to the rocks which covered the rough trail, for Cody well knew that was unnecessary, and that so long as the manacles and wristlets held, the deserter could not travel far from the spot.

"Stay right around here, Reddy," he advised, "for if you get off the trail you'll be sure to starve."

Thus having arranged, Cody mounted again and rode off, leaving the now thoroughly cowed Reddy alone with his evil thoughts.

On, on, pressed Buffalo Bill, in as hard a ride as he ever undertook, and just as the sun was setting, the next day, he was spied from the fort lookout and his coming reported to the commanding officer.

His long absence was beginning to cause Major Randall and all great uneasiness, but

he was seen to be safe, and as the great scout approached the stockade, cheer after cheer welcomed him!

Once within the stockade gates, Buffalo Bill proceeded direct to Major Randall's quarters to report.

The major listened to Buffalo Bill's story of his long and adventurous expedition, and said:

"Well, Cody, you are indeed the Wizard of the War-path, for what you go upon the trail to seek, you never fail to find."

"You shall have full credit for this remarkable work you have done, and for the capture of this bad man, Redfield."

"Don't forget Doctor Dick, also, major, for what I accomplished was through his aid, sir," reminded the scout.

"He shall have credit, too, and I hope to have him visit us some time at the fort. I very much desire to meet this extraordinary man."

"He may soon visit us, major, for I have an appointment with him in a few days."

"Here?"

"No, sir."

"Where, then, may I ask?"

"At the Grand Canyon, sir."

"In the name of all the saints, what are you two going there for?"

"Well, sir, I have a curiosity to see the canyon, for one thing, and we wish to find the Hermit that lives there also."

"When do you go?"

"I leave here, sir, in about five days, so as to be at the rendezvous on time."

"I suppose there is no use of my ordering you not to go, Cody?"

"I hope not, sir, for I would like to solve that mystery."

"Well, you are so able to take care of yourself that I will say you can go."

"Thank you, sir!"

"But you had better take some of your men with you."

"No, sir, I prefer to go alone. Doctor Dick is worth a dozen men."

"Well, I wish you every success," said Major Randall, as the scout departed to go to his quarters and seek much-needed rest.

CHAPTER LXI.

IN MORTAL TERROR.

WHEN left alone by Buffalo Bill, the prisoner in irons gazed after the departing scout as far as he could catch a glimpse of him in the distance.

When at last he disappeared from view his face became more livid in hue, and he moved uneasily about.

There was in his heart the feeling that the scout had not deserted him, that he would return for him, slow as must be the pace on to the fort if they went together.

But all hope gradually died out that this would be the case as several hours passed away and the scout did not reappear.

Then all the horror of his position flashed upon him, and he groaned aloud in his mental anguish.

He had brought it upon himself he well knew, for, when unnoticed by the scout, he had driven the small blade of his knife into the hoof of his horse to lame him, using a stone to do so with.

He was not sure how he would benefit by it, but he was as tricky as a fox and cruel as a coyote, and did all he could to change his position as best he might, annoy his captor and delay the progress to the fort.

Now as he sat there alone he felt all the horror of his situation.

He was not tied to one place, but he was ironed hands and feet.

Able to move about, it was only in a creeping way, and he felt that he could not get far off in a day.

And if he did succeed in getting a mile or two away, his trail could be followed and he would be overtaken.

Not far away from him lay the dead body of his horse, which he had so cruelly lamed, and it would not be very long before the coyotes would scent blood and come for a feast.

He would hear them near him all night, snarling and fighting over the feast, and their bright eyes would be longingly turned upon him as a dessert.

Could he beat them off until help came?

It would not take the beasts long to find out that he was almost helpless.

The instinct that caused them to follow a wounded, or sick buffalo, deer or antelope, knowing that their patience would in the end be rewarded, would also tell them that the man was unable to defend himself, and before long he must fall their prey.

These thoughts all crowded upon the brain of the man until he felt tempted to take his own life.

He had glossed over his misdeeds before, never allowed himself to think, and by busy action had driven off all twinges of conscience, all bitter, cruel memories.

But there was nothing for him to do now but think, and his thoughts seemed to fairly burn into his brain.

Night came on and as soon as the shadows deepened, afar off he heard the yelp of a coyote.

He started as though a rifle-shot had been fired at him.

The yelp was a signal that there was game abroad, that a feast was waiting for hungry beasts to devour.

The call was answered from another direction, and afar off came a third sharp bark.

The leader of the coyotes was gathering his clans together to devour the dead horse, and every added yelp gave the prisoner greater terror.

Nearer and nearer came the cries of the wild beasts, until at last, though he could not see them in the darkness, Reddy knew that the thickets were full of the ravenous creatures.

He shouted wildly and there was a scattering.

But only for awhile, and again the coyotes assembled.

Shouts were not dangerous the beasts soon discovered, and it was not very long before a perfect chorus of howls, yelps and whines made the night hideous.

If they enjoyed it, if they were expressing gratitude before feasting, to the prisoner it was like unto death.

At last with wild yells they attacked their midnight supper, and the snapping of teeth, the growls and savage yelps told that they were fighting for the choice morsels furnished them by the prisoner laming his horse as he did, and which necessitated his having to be shot.

Bitterly, over and over again did Reddy curse himself for his act of cruelty, but all to no avail, for there was no help for him, he must grin and bear the result of his work.

At last the night wore away, and with the rising sun the coyotes scattered as the man hobbled toward them.

But it was a long day of terror and despair that followed, and another night more terrible still.

With the dawn of a second day the man saw that the bones of the horse had been picked clean.

"To-night they will attack me," he groaned.

And so the day wore along with the man in mortal terror for his life, until at last the thought came to him that, bound as he was, he could, in his despair, climb a tree.

He hastily sought for one where he could find a resting place above the highest springs of the wolves, and taking his food and canteen with him, he went toward the tree.

He found it a giant task to climb it, but as it was bent over by the wind, as the trunk was gnarled and knotty, he at last, after an hour of desperate struggle, was successful in reaching the limbs where he could rest.

With his belt and canteen strap he then tied himself among the branches securely, and satisfied that he would at least not be torn to pieces that night, he gave a wild shout of triumph which scattered afar the coyotes that were greedily watching his movements.

Then thought came to him once more, and he muttered to himself:

"How strange it is that I, who will be hanged upon my return to the fort, should so struggle against death, a scarcely less dreaded death, for these wolves would quickly end my existence, yes, as quickly as the noose of the hangman."

CHAPTER LXII.

THE SENTENCE.

Soon after the arrival of Buffalo Bill at the fort, Lieutenant Tompkins and a dozen

of his countrymen were dispatched to bring back the prisoner Reddy.

A skillful scout accompanied the party, and Buffalo Bill described to him just where they could push on and halt before dawn, so, after a rest of a couple of hours, when daylight came, they would be able to pick up his trail and follow it on to where he had left the prisoner.

The chief of scouts was most anxious to have the soldiers lose no time in going after the man, as he well knew the danger of leaving him there, unarmed and in irons, but felt that it could not be helped.

Still he did not wish the man, though certain to be executed when brought to the fort, to die through his leaving him behind, and to meet an awful death by being torn to pieces by wolves.

When therefore Lieutenant Tompkins was the officer sent on the duty, and had departed upon his mission, Buffalo Bill felt relieved, but he had said to the scout that was to go as guide:

"Don't delay a minute longer than you have to, and make no mistake in following my trail."

Lieutenant Tompkins was not a man to delay on a trail, and he pushed along until the guide told him that they had gone as far as they dared without having found Buffalo Bill's trail.

So they went into camp and had a couple of hours' sleep, after which breakfast was eaten and the horses were saddled and ready for the trail.

In the mean while, with the first glimmer of dawn the scout had been out on foot looking for the trail of Buffalo Bill, and found it after a short search, so was ready to push on as soon as all had breakfast.

The pace set was a lively one, but the horses were comparatively fresh, the trail was well marked, and no halt was made until noon.

An hour's rest and the party were again in the saddle.

The sun was yet an hour high, when the scout halted, with his hand to his ear.

"They are after him, sir."

"Who?"

"The coyotes."

"Yes, I hear them."

"We will push on more rapidly."

"They has got him treed, sir, I guess," said the scout, and he started off at a gallop.

A ride of a mile and they were greeted with a shout of delight.

"A man greeting with a shout of welcome those who have come to carry him to his death," muttered Lieutenant Tompkins.

But he dashed up to the tree, scattering the coyotes gathered about it with a few revolver shots, and said:

"Ho, Redfield, we have found you!"

"Yes, and in time to save me from those terrible brutes, for some of them ran up the trunk nearly to my feet."

"To-night they would have gnawed the tree down."

"Come, men, help him down and make him comfortable, for we will camp here to-night," said Lieutenant Tompkins, and his men hastened to obey.

That night Reddy slept soundly, for he was worn out, heart, brain and body, and for the time being seemed content to escape from the coyotes, whatever might be his fate upon reaching the fort.

After breakfast the party started, by slow marches for the fort, and reached there upon the afternoon of the next day.

All eyes were upon the prisoner as he rode in between two cavalrymen, for his irons had been removed, and not a glance of pity was given him, for every soldier knew how heinous had been his crimes, and that he richly merited death as punishment.

Buffalo Bill had, when the coming back of the party had been reported to him, gone at once to a point where he could get a view and leveled his field glass upon them.

He gave a sigh of relief when he saw in the midst of the soldiers the prisoner, and riding along unaided.

When he had had time to rest, Reddy was taken before Major Randall, who promptly recognized him as the man that was wanted, and other witnesses also asserted that there was no mistake as to the man.

So Reddy was sent to the guard-house in

irons, and a consultation of officers was called to decide upon his fate.

In this council it was shown that he was already under sentence of death, that he had escaped, and the special orders were that he was to be taken "dead or alive," and a price was offered for him under either circumstance.

If captured alive and taken to a frontier fort, after ten days' respite, he was to be executed in any manner that the commanding officer deemed best.

With such orders to guide him, Major Randall at once set the day of execution ten days off, and commanded that he should be granted his request, which was to be shot to death by a platoon of soldiers.

CHAPTER LXIII.

THE RENDEZVOUS.

The capture of Reddy, and his being brought safely into camp, won for Buffalo Bill considerable praise when it became known how much he had gone through in getting possession of the man, and the trouble he had had with him on the trail to the post.

The men seemed to feel a relief that the end would soon be over, while the scout congratulated himself that his appointment with Doctor Dick at the rendezvous of the deserted camp, would call him away from the fort before the day of execution.

What he had to do in the strict line of stern duty, Buffalo Bill never shrank from, no matter how deeply he might feel what he was forced to be an actor in; but he shunned, as a brave man ever does, seeing the suffering of another, and did not wish to be near when his prisoner was led forth to die.

One man at the mercy of many, even when he has sinned against Heaven and his fellow-beings most grievously, and deserves punishment, is a sad sight to look upon, a pitiable scene to gaze upon, and Buffalo Bill's brave but tender heart revolted at the thought, and so it was that he was most anxious to get away and fill his appointment with Doctor Dick.

So it was that, five days after, Buffalo Bill returned to the fort and reported to Major Randall that he was ready to depart, and, mounted upon a fine horse, and with another one carrying his pack, the scout set off on his mysterious and perilous journey.

He took his time in going, but arrived at the deserted camp on the tenth day as he had promised Doctor Dick.

The doctor was not there, however, and as he had not arrived the next day, the scout left his horses in camp and went off on foot hunting.

He was just about to leave a thick growth of cedars, some miles from his camp, when he started back as he saw a horseman going alone down the valley.

He had following him two horses carrying heavy packs, but he was too far off for the scout to trail him.

"No, I will be able to follow the trail of his three horses without trouble, so I'll not attract his attention now."

"Yes, it is the Hermit of the Canyon, Andrew Seldon, and even if he did kill Hugh Mayhew the doctor shall do him no harm, for I owe it to him that I was not killed the other day."

So back to camp went Buffalo Bill, carrying with him some fine venison steaks and a wild turkey.

That evening at sunset Doctor Dick rode into camp, also leading a pack-horse and well supplied with all that was needed for the expedition.

The scout told the doctor of the trouble he had had with the prisoner, Reddy, and how he had been forced to leave him on the trail through his having lamed his horse purposely, for the man had defiantly confessed as much to Lieutenant Tompkins on the ride back to the post.

"And this is the day appointed for his execution—yes, about this very hour he is being led out to die," said Buffalo Bill.

"He will be hanged, of course," said Doctor Dick.

"No; Major Randall allowed him to be shot, instead."

"The major was merciful," and there was a slight sneer in the tone of Doctor Dick.

"I think it wise to show mercy where it can be done, for, as the man had to die, it

was only kindness to allow him to have the choice of the manner of his taking off."

"Yet brave soldiers are shot."

"In honorable battle, yes; but this man's death was demanded by the stern law of military discipline, and when he is shot justice will be satisfied, and an example set as a warning to others not to sin as he has done, so I say peace to his ashes," and Buffalo Bill glanced at his watch as he uttered the words and saw that it was just the hour set for the execution.

"Well, Cody," said the doctor, after a moment of silence, "do we start upon this trail to-night?"

"No, not until morning, when we will have the day before us."

"It is just as well."

"The man has returned to the canyon, for I saw him pass when I was hunting game."

"Ah! did you speak with him?"

"Oh, no, but we can go directly to the spot where I saw him, and from there readily follow his trail on to his retreat."

"That is good, and I will be glad when the secret is solved whether he be Wallace Weston in reality, or Andrew Seldon, and if the latter, why he took the life of my poor brother Hugh."

"By seeing him you will know; but, Doctor Dick, I cannot stand by and allow you to attack one who saved my life as Andrew Seldon did," said Buffalo Bill firmly.

"I do not ask it, Cody."

"I knew Seldon well, and liked him, while, if he was wronged by Hugh, which I cannot but doubt, I can say no word against his death as stated."

"I only wish to know if Weston is yet alive, living in that canyon with Seldon, and of the death of my brother Hugh."

"Then I shall be content to come away with you and let the past be forgotten."

"Well, we will start early in the morning," answered Buffalo Bill; and the next morning they started out from the camp and rode to the spot where Buffalo Bill had been when he saw the Hermit of the Canyon go by.

From there he rode to the place where the Hermit had passed and readily picked up the trail left by the strange man whose identity Doctor Dick was so anxious to establish.

For miles Buffalo Bill followed the tracks of the three horses, and by night had reached the canyon, so they went into camp, and the next day it was taken up again, and the two pushed on to the very verge of the mighty abyss, where they were astounded to find that the trail down into it was by a path that it seemed fatal to follow.

CHAPTER LXIV.

THE HERMIT.

WHEN Andrew Seldon left Buffalo Bill, after his saving him from the outlaws, he went on his way to Wingate.

He had been over the same trail three months before, and knew it well, so had no delay in hunting for a trail.

On the third day he arrived at Wingate, and going to the sutler's store at once gave in a list of what purchases he wanted to make, at the same time telling him to get for him two good pack-animals.

"I'll have them all ready for you, sir; but when do you wish to start back?"

"In the morning."

"So soon?"

"Yes, I must return at once."

"Then I'll be putting up the things while you read your letters, for there are a couple here for you."

Seldon took the two letters.

One was official looking, and both were addressed to

"ANDREW SELDON,

Fort Wingate.

The man dared not open them there, so went off by himself and then tore open the envelope of one addressed in a woman's hand.

It was dated at a fashionable school in the North, and was as follows:

"SIR:—Your letter to your daughter was received, and I am pained to inform you that she is no more, having passed away at this boarding school six months ago."

"I refer you to her guardian, in your absence, Lawyer Edgar Stone."

"I have the honor to be,

"Yours, etc., MADAM BERAND."

"Poor child! Then I have not even her to make happy by my imposture as her father."

"Now to see what the lawyer says."

He opened the official envelope and read:

"MY DEAR ANDREW:—

"I suppose Madam Berand has informed you of the death of Celeste, so that severs the last tie you have that would wish to bring you home."

"In real truth, it would be madness for you to come, for a feud is sworn against you by the Markhams, who will insist that your duel with their brother was murder on your part."

"If you returned, your death would at once follow at their hands."

"You left your affairs here in such a state that there is not a dollar to be obtained from your property, and so I can send you nothing."

"As you have not been successful in mining, I do not know what to advise, only do not ever think of coming here, I beg of you."

"With the hope that you may prosper,
"Yours, EDGAR STONE."

"Well, even if I had wished to go back as Andrew Seldon, I am debarred from doing so, and Wallace Weston is dead, so back to the Grand Canyon I go, to work out with Lucas Langley my fortune in my own way, and then seek a foreign land where we can enjoy it."

So back he started the next morning, leading his pack-horses, and well supplied for the winter with all that he and his sole companion would need.

As he rode along he could not but muse over the misfortunes that had befallen the life of the man whom he was impersonating.

A deed had driven him from his home and loved ones, and for a long while he had been unsuccessful in his mining.

Then when he had discovered gold in large quantity, far from any habitation or settlement, and was going back to his home to spread the joyful news, and have others accompany him there to share in his rich find, he had gone astray upon the desert and died of starvation, while another, himself, had reaped the benefit of what he had found, through the maps and papers discovered upon the body of the dead man.

From papers also found upon the body, Wallace Weston had discovered that Andrew Seldon had not been the one to bring the duel about, but had sought to avoid it, and that it was only because he knew that no justice could be gained for him then, no mercy shown him, that he had fled to the West.

He had left large properties behind him, these same papers revealed, which now his lawyer and friend, wrote him were of no value, while the daughter he had so loved, as all he had written in his diary had proven, was dead, as was also his wife.

"His was a cruel fate as mine has been," muttered the miner as he pondered over the misfortunes of the real Andrew Seldon.

"But, with wife and daughter gone, I will not need to share the gold I have found through him with others who held no claim upon him."

"No, I will keep it for myself, and get what good out of life I can."

And so Andrew Seldon, as he had determined to call himself for the future, rode on his way to the canyon to rejoin his comrade Lucas Langley.

CHAPTER LXV.

CONCLUSION.

WHEN Buffalo Bill and the doctor came to the brink of the mighty canyon, they halted there with awe and admiration commingled in their glance over Nature's greatest work.

A short search revealed to Buffalo Bill that a descent into the canyon, by that dizzy, dangerous trail would be at the peril of their lives.

But they had come there to solve the secret, and they were neither of them men to

turn back with victory in sight, no matter what obstacles to be overcome.

So they went into camp back upon the ridge, and prepared for the work before them, by adjusting the pack-saddles differently, and having all ready for whatever might confront them.

The next morning early they arose, breakfasted, saddled up and rode down to the large rock around which they would have to make their way, and there stood regarding the undertaking they had set out to overcome.

Nothing daunted, Buffalo Bill and Doctor Dick led their horses along the dizzy trail, worked them cautiously around the rock that was the greatest danger point, and held on down into the valley.

Up they went through the valley, awed by the grandeur of the scenery until, night coming on, they went into camp there.

When asleep they were aroused by a tremendous crashing sound that shook the earth.

It sounded like one mighty burst of thunder, or the solid discharge of a frigate's broadside.

Down the valley rolled thundering echoes, and clouds of dust and sand were swept over their camp.

Thus they awaited until morning, sleeping no more that night, and then once more the now deeply anxious travelers took up the trail.

It led to a mass of piled-up rocks, which had fallen from a cliff thousands of feet in height.

One end of a crushed cabin was visible, and pointing to it Buffalo Bill said:

"Fate is against our solving the secret, Doctor Dick, for there is the Hermit's cabin, crushed to atoms. Here he dwelt, he and his companion, and beneath these acres of red stone all are buried,—men, horses and all—see, here is a rock upon which is painted a name."

"Yes, it is that of Andrew Seldon.

"It was he who killed my brother, and I now feel that Wallace Weston is dead, even if he was the companion here of Andrew Seldon.

"But, Andrew Seldon is also dead, and this is his mighty monument, this heap of stones."

"Yes, they were mining under the cliff for gold and the mass of rocks gave way and buried them," was Buffalo Bill's opinion.

"Yes, buried them and all their belongings."

"Come, let us get out of this weird, awful place, and never set foot here again."

The scout, with all his nerve, was willing to go, so they retraced their way up the dizzy heights once more, little dreaming that eyes followed their movements, for in reality the two miners had not perished but had moved their camp, fearing that very disaster of the falling of the cliff.

They remained behind, buried from the world as the Hermits of the Grand Canyon, laying up gold to enjoy at a future day when they dared venture forth and face their fellow-men in a foreign land.

And away from the awful spot went the scout and Doctor Dick, the latter to return to Last Chance and live a life of mystery, of strangest romance and thrilling adventure, while Buffalo Bill continued to win laurels in his daring career that has made his name famous the wide world over.

THE END.

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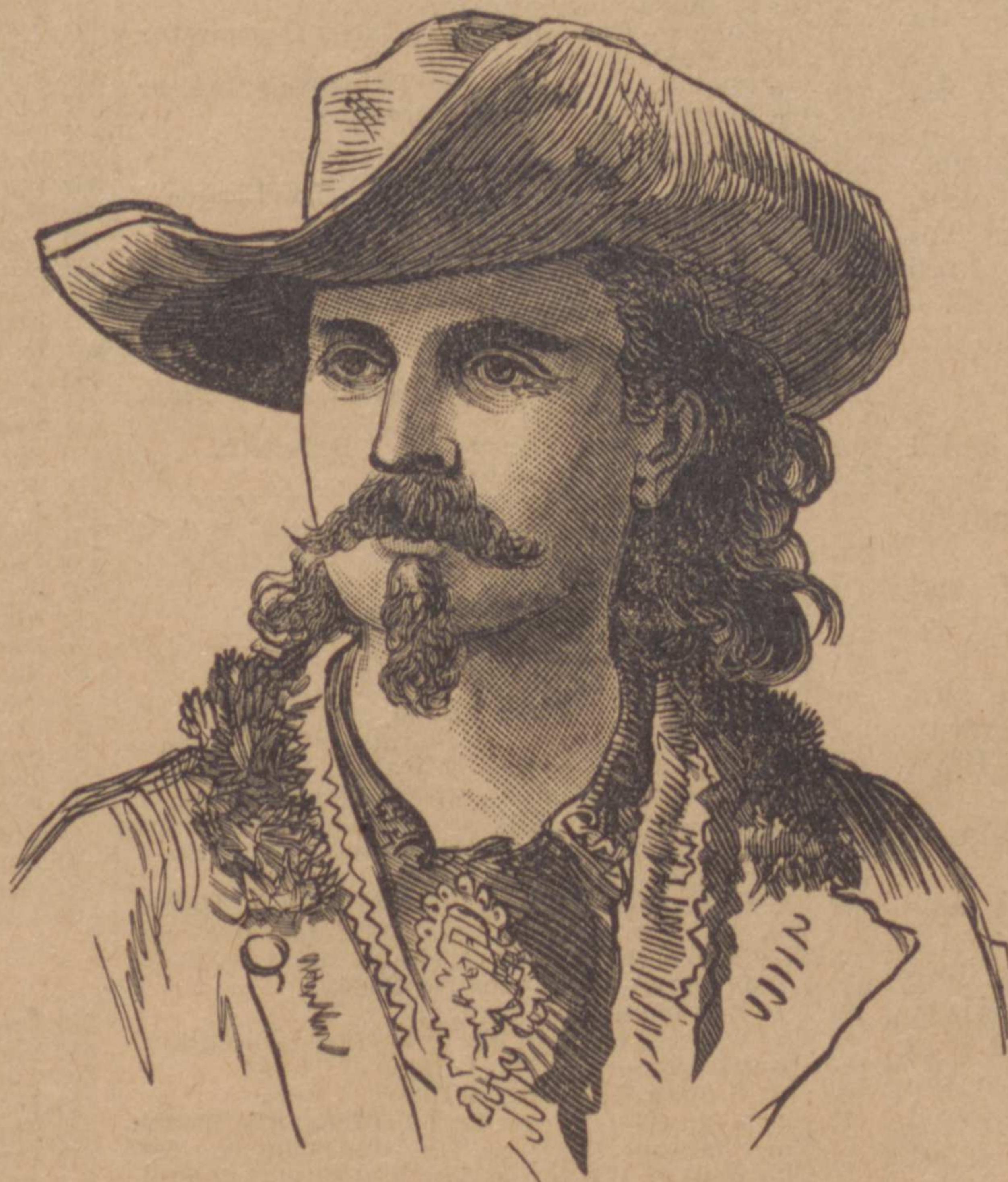
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